National Bestseller

LIES MY TEACHER TOLD ME

Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong

"Every teacher, every student of history, every citizen should read this book. It is both a refreshing antidote to what has passed for history in our educational system and a one-volume education in itself." -Howard Zinn, author of *A People's History of the United States*

JAMES W. LOEWEN

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It would be better not to know so many things than to know so many things that are not so.

Felix Okoye American history is longer, larger, more various, more beautiful, and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about It.

James Baldwin Concealment of the historical truth is a crime against the people.

Gen. Petro G. Grigorenko, samizdat letter to a historyjournal, c. 1975, USSR Those who don't remember the past are condemned to repeat the eleventh grade. James W. Loewen

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Introduction: Something Has Gone Very Wrong

High school students hate history. When they list their favorite subjects, history invariably comes in last. Students consider history “the most irrelevant” of twenty-one subjects commonly taught in high school. Bor-r-rtng is the adjective they apply to it. When students can, they avoid it, even though most students get higher grades in history than in math, science, or English. Even when they are forced to take classes in history, they repress what they learn, so every year or two another study decries what our seventeen-year-olds don't know.

African American, Native American, and Latino students view history with a special dislike. They also learn history especially poorly. Students of color do only slightly worse than white students in mathematics. If you'll pardon my grammar, non-white students do more worse in English and most worse in history. Something intriguing is going on here: surely history is not more difficult for minorities than trigonometry or Faulkner. Students don't even know they are alienated, only that they “don't like social studies” or “aren't any good at history.” In college, most students of color give history departments a wide berth.

Many history teachers perceive the low morale in their classrooms. If they have a lot of time, light domestic responsibilities, sufficient resources, and a flexible principal, some teachers respond by abandoning the overstuffed textbooks and reinventing their American history courses. All too many teachers grow disheartened and settle for less. At least dimly aware that their students are not requiting their own love of history, these teachers withdraw some of their energy from their courses. Gradually they end up going through the motions, staying ahead of their students in the textbooks, covering only material that will appear on the next test.

College teachers in most disciplines are happy when their students have had significant exposure to the subject before college. Not teachers in history. History professors in college

routinely put down high school history courses. A colleague of mine calls his survey of American history “Iconoclasm I and II,” because he sees his job as disabusing his charges of what they learned in high school. In no other field does this happen. Mathematics professors, for instance, know that non-Euclidean geometry is rarely taught in high school, but they don't assume that Euclidean geometry wasmistaught.Professors of English literature don't presume that Romeo andJuliet was misunderstood in high school. Indeed, history is the only field in which the more courses students take, the stupider they become.

Perhaps I do not need to convince you that American history is important. More than any other topic, it is about us. Whether one deems our present society wondrous or awful or both, history reveals how we arrived at this point. Understanding our past is central to our ability to understand ourselves and the world around us. We need to know our history, and according to C. Wright Mills, we know we da.

Outside of school, Americans show great interest in history. Historical novels, whether by Gore Vidal (Lincoln, Burr, et al.) or Dana Fuller Ross (Idaho!, Utah!, Nebraska!, Oregon!, Missouri.', and on! and on!) often become bestsellers. The National Museum of American History is one of the three big draws of the Smithsonian Institution. The series “The Civil War” attracted new audiences to public television. Movies based on historical incidents or themes are a continuing source of fascination, from Birth ofa Nation through Gone with the Wind to Dances with Wolves andJFK.

Our situation is this: American history is full of fantastic and important stories. These stories have the power to spellbind audiences, even audiences of difficult seventh-graders. These same stories show what America has been about and are directly relevant to our present society. American audiences, even young ones, need and want to know about their national past. Yet they sleep through the classes that present it.

What has gone wrong?

We begin to get a handle on this question by noting that the teaching of history, more than any other discipline, is dominated by textbooks. And students are right: the books are boring.“ The stories that history textbooks tell are predictable; every problem has already been solved or is about to be solved. Textbooks exclude conflict or real suspense. They leave out anything that might reflect badly

upon our national character. When they try for drama, they achieve only melodrama, because readers know that everything will turn out fine in the end. ”Despite setbacks, the United States overcame these challenges,“ in the words of one textbook. Most authors of history textbooks don't even try for melodrama. Instead, they write in a tone that if heard aloud might be described as ”mumbling lecturer." No wonder students lose interest.

Textbooks almost never use the present to illuminate the past. They might ask students to consider gender roles in contemporary society as a means of prompting students to think about what women did and did not achieve in the suffrage movement or in the more recent women's movement. They might ask students to prepare household budgets for the families of a janitor and a stockbroker as a means of prompting thinking about labor unions and social classes in the past and present. They might, but they don't. The present is not a source of information for writers of history textbooks.

Conversely, textbooks seldom use the past to illuminate the present. They portray the past as a simple-minded morality play. “Be a good citizen” is the message that textbooks extract from the past. “You have a proud heritage. Be all that you can be. After all, look at what the United States has accomplished.” While there is nothing wrong with optimism, it can become something of a burden for students of color, children of working-class parents, girls who notice the dearth of female historical figures, or members of any group that has not achieved socio-economic success. The optimistic approach prevents any under standing of failure other than blaming the victim. No wonder children of color are alienated. Even for male children from affluent white families, bland optimism gets pretty boring after eight hundred pages.

Textbooks in American history stand in sharp contrast to other teaching materials. Why are history textbooks so bad? Nationalism is one of the culprits. Textbooks are often muddled by the conflicting desires to promote inquiry and to indoctrinate blind patriotism. “Take a look in your history book, and you'll see why we should be proud,” goes an anthem often sung by high school glee clubs. But we need not even look inside. The titles themselves tell the story: The Great Republic, The American Way, Land of Promise, Rise the American Nation. Such titles differ from the titles of all

other textbooks students read in high school or college. Chemistry books, for example, are called Chemistry or Principles ofChemistry, not Rise ofthe Molecule. And you can tell history textbooks just from their covers, graced as they are with American flags, bald eagles, the Statue of Liberty.

Between the glossy covers, American history textbooks are full of information-overly full. These books are huge. The specimens in my collection of a dozen of the most popular textbooks average four and a half pounds in weight and 888 pages in length. No publisher wants to lose an adoption because a book has left out a detail of concern to a particular geographical area or a particular group. Textbook authors seem compelled to include a paragraph about every U.S. president, even Chester A. Arthur and Millard Fillmore. Then there are the review pages at the end of each chapter. Land ofPromise, to take one example, enumerates 444 chapter-closing “Main Ideas.” In addition, the book lists literally thousands of “Skill Activities,” “Key Terms,” “Matching” items, “Fill in the Blanks,” “Thinking Critically” questions, and “Review Identifications,” as well as still more “Main Ideas” at the ends of the various sections within each chapter. At year's end, no student can remember 444 main ideas, not to mention 624 key terms and countless other “factoids.” So students and teachers fall back on one main idea: to memorize the terms for the test following each chapter, then forget them to clear the synapses for the next chapter. No wonder so many high school graduates cannot remember in which century the Civil War was fought!

None of the facts is remembered, because they are presented simply as one damn thing after another. While textbook authors tend to include most of the trees and all too many twigs, they neglect to give readers even a glimpse of what they might find memorable: the forests. Textbooks stifle meaning by suppressing causation. Students exit history textbooks without having developed the ability to think coherently about social Life.

Even though the books bulge with detail, even though the courses are so busy they rarely reach 1960, our teachers and our textbooks still leave out most of what we need to know about the American past. Some of the factoids they present are flatly wrong or unverifiable. In sum, startling errors of omission and distortion mar American histories.

Errors in history textbooks often go uncorrected, partly because the history profession does not bother to review

textbooks. Occasionally outsiders do: Frances FitzGerald's 1979 study, America Revised, was a bestseller, but it made no impact on the industry. In pointing out how textbooks ignored or distorted the Spanish impact on Latin America and the colonial United States, FitzGerald predicted, “Text publishers may now be on the verge of rewriting history.” But she was wrongthe books have not changed.

History can be imagined as a pyramid. At its base are the millions of primary sourcesthe plantation records, city directories, speeches, songs, photographs, newspaper articles, diaries, and letters that document times past. Based on these primary materials, historians write secondary worksbooks and articles on subjects ranging from daftness on Martha's Vineyard to Grant's tactics at Vicksburg. Historians produce hundreds of these works every year, many of them splendid. In theory, a few historians, working individually or in teams, then synthesize the secondary literature into tertiary workstextbooks covering all phases of U.S. history.

In practice, however, it doesn't happen that way. Instead, history textbooks are clones of each other. The first thing editors do when recruiting new authors is to send them a half-dozen examples of the competition. Often a textbook is written not by the authors whose names grace its cover, but by minions deep in the bowels of the publisher's offices. When historians do write textbooks, they risk snickers from their colleagues-tinged with envy, but snickers nonetheless: “Why are you devoting time to pedagogy rather than original research?”

The result is not happy for textbook scholarship. Many history textbooks list up-to-the-minute secondary sources in their bibliographies, yet the narratives remain totally traditionalunaffected by recent research.'

What would we think of a course in poetry in which students never read a poem? The editors' voice in an English literature textbook might be as dull as the voice in a history textbook, but at lease in the English textbook the voice stills when the book presents original works of literature. The omniscient narrator's voice of history textbooks insulates students from the raw materials of history. Rarely do authors quote speeches, songs, diaries, or letters. Students need not be protected from this material. They can just as well read one paragraph from William Jennings Bryan's “Cross of Gold” speech as read American Adventures's two paragraphs about it.

Textbooks also keep students in the dark about the nature of history. History is furious debate informed by evidence and reason. Textbooks encourage students to believe that history is facts to be learned. “We have not avoided controversial issues,” announces one set of textbook authors; “instead, we have tried to offer reasoned judgments” on themthus removing the controversy! Because textbooks employ such a godlike tone, it never occurs to most students to question them. “In retrospect I ask myself, why didn't I think to ask, for example, who were the original inhabitants of the Americas, what was their life like, and how did it change when Columbus arrived,” wrote a student of mine in 1991. “However, back then everything was presented as if it were the full picture,” she continued, “so] never thought to doubt that it was.”

As a result of all this, most high school seniors are hamstrung in their efforts to analyze controversial issues in our society. (I know because I encounter these students the next year as college freshmen.) We've got to do better. Fivesixths of all Americans never take a course in American history beyond high school. What our citizens “learn” in high school forms much of what they know about our past.

This book includes ten chapters of amazing storiessome wonderful, some ghastlyin American history. Arranged in roughly chronological order, these chapters do not relate mere details but events and processes with important consequences. Yet most textbooks leave out or distort these events and processes. I know, because for several years I have been lugging around twelve textbooks, taking them seriously as works of history and ideology, studying what they say and don't say, and trying to figure out why. I chose the twelve as representing the range of textbooks available for American history courses. Two of the books, Discovering American History and The American Adventure, are “inquiry textbooks” composed of maps, illustrations, and extracts from primary sources such as diaries and laws, all woven together by an overarching narrative .These books are supposed to invite students to “do” history themselves. The American Way,Land of Promise, The Untied St Republic, American History, and The American Tradition are traditional high school narrative history textbooks. American Adventures, Life and Liberty, and The Challenge of Freedom are intended for junior high students but are often used by “slow” senior high classes. Triumph of the American Nation and The American

Pageant are used on college campuses as well as in high schools.' These twelve textbooks, which are listed (with full citations) in the appendix, have been my window into the world of what high school students carry home, read, memorize, and forget. In addition, I have spent many hours observing high school history classes in Mississippi, Vermont, and the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, and more hours interviewing high school history teachers.

Chapter Eleven analyzes the process of textbook creation and adoption in an attempt to explain what causes textbooks to be as bad as they are. I must confess an interest here: I once co-wrote a history textbook. Mississippi: Conflict and Change was the first revisionist state history textbook in America. Although the book won the Lillian Smith Award for "bestnon-fictionabout the South" in 1975, Mississippi rejected it for use in public schools. In turn, three local school systems, my coauthor, and I sued the state textbook board. In April 1980 Loewn et a/, v.Turnipseedel al. resulted in a sweeping victory on the basis of the First and Fourteenth Amendments. The experience taught me firsthand more than most writers or publishers would ever want to know about the textbook adoption process. I also learned that not all the blame can be laid at the doorstep of the adoption agencies.

Chapter Twelve looks at the effects of using standard American history textbooks. It shows that the books actually make students stupid. Finally, an afterword cites distortions and omissions undiscussed in earlier chapters and recommends ways that teachers can teach and students can learn American history more honestly. It is offered as an inoculation program ofsorts against the future lies we are otherwise sure to encounter.

What passes for identity in America is a series of myths about one's heroic ancestors.

James Baldwin One is astonished in the study of history at the recurrence of the idea that evil must be forgotten, distorted, skimmed over. We must not remember that Daniel Webster got drunk but only remember that he was a splendid constitutional lawyer. We must forget that George Washington was a slave owner . . . and simply remember the things we regard as creditable and inspiring. The difficulty. Of course, with this philosophy is that history loses its value as an incentive and example; it paints perfect men and noble nations, but it does not tell the truth.

By idolizing those whom we honor, we do a disservice

both to them and to ourselves. . . . We fail to recognize that we could go and do likewise.

Charles V. Willie

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1. Handicapped by History: The Process of Hero-making

This chapter is about heroification, a degenerative process (much like calcification) that makes people over into heroes. Through this process, our educational media turn flesh-and-blood individuals into pious, perfect creatures without conflicts, pain, credibility, or human interest. Many American history textbooks are studded with biographical vignettes of the very famous (Land of Promise devotes a box to each president) and the famous (The Challenge ofFreedom provides “Did You Know?” boxes about Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman to graduate from medical school in the United States, and Lorraine Hansberry, author of A Raisin in the Sun, among many others). In themselves, vignettes are not a bad idea. They instruct by human example. They show diverse ways that people can make a difference. They allow textbooks to give space to characters such as Blackwell and Hansberry, who relieve what would otherwise be a monolithic parade of white male political leaders. Biographical vignettes also provoke reflection as to our purpose in teaching history: Is Chester A. Arthur more deserving of space than, say, Frank Lloyd Wright? Who influences us more todayWright, who invented the carport and transformed domestic architectural spaces, or Arthur, who, um, signed the first Civil Service Act? Whose rise to prominence provides more drama Blackwell's or George Bush's (the latter born with a silver Senate seat in his mouth)? The choices are debatable, but surely textbooks should include some people based not only on what they achieved but also on the distance they traversed to achieve it.

We could go on to thirdand fourth-guess the list of heroes in textbook pantheons. My concern here, however, is not who gets chosen, but rather what happens to the heroes when they are introduced into our history textbooks and our classrooms. Two twentieth-century Americans provide case studies of heroification: Woodrow Wilson and Helen Keller. Wilson was unarguably an important president, and he receives extensive textbook coverage. Keller, on the other

hand, was a “little person” who pushed through no legislation, changed the course of no scientific discipline, declared no war. Only one of the twelve history textbooks I surveyed includes her photograph. But teachers love to talk about Keller and often show audiovisual materials or recommend biographies that present her life as exemplary. All this attention ensures that students retain something about both of these historical figures, but they may be no better off for it. Heroification so distorts the lives of Keller and Wilson (and many others) that we cannot think straight about them.

Teachers have held up Helen Keller, the blind and deaf girl who overcame her physical handicaps, as an inspiration to generations ofschoolchildren. Every fifth-grader knows the scene in which Anne Sullivan spells water into young Helen's hand at the pump. At least a dozen movies and filmstrips have been made on Keller's life. Each yields its version of the same cliche. A McGraw-Hill educational film concludes; “The gift of Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan to the world is to constantly remind us of the wonder of the world around us and how much we owe those who taught us what it means, for there is no person that is unworthy or incapable of being helped, and the greatest service any person can make us is to help another reach true potential.”

To draw such a bland maxim from the life of Helen Keller, historians and filmmakers have disregarded her actual biography and left out the lessons she specifically asked us to learn from it. Keller, who struggled so valiantly to learn to speak, has been made mute by history. The result is that we really don't know much about her.

Over the past ten years, I have asked dozens of college students who Helen Keller was and what she did. They all know that she was a blind and deaf girl. Most of them know that she was befriended by a teacher, Anne Sullivan, and learned to read and write and even to speak. Some students can recall rather minute details of Keller's early life: that she lived in Alabama, that she was unruly and without manners before Sullivan came along, and so forth. A few know that Keller graduated from college. But about what happened next, about the whole of her adult life, they are ignorant. A few students venture that Keller became a “public figure” or a “humanitarian,” perhaps on behalf of the blind or deaf. “She wrote, didn't she?” or “she spoke”conjectures without content. Keller, who was born in 1880, graduated from

Radcliffe in 1904 and died in 1968. To ignore the sixty-four years of her adult life or to encapsulate them with the single word humanitarian is to lie by omission.

The truth is that Helen Keller was a radical socialist. She joined the Socialist parry of Massachusetts in 1909. She had become a social radical even before she graduated from Radcliffe, and not, she emphasized, because of any teachings available there. After the Russian Revolution, she sang the praises of the new communist nation: “In the East a new star is risen! With pain and anguish the old order has given birth to the new, and behold in the East a manchild is born! Onward, comrades, all together! Onward to the campfires of Russia! Onward to the coming dawn!”' Keller hung a red flag over the desk in her study. Gradually she moved to the left of the Socialist party and became a Wobbly, a member of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the syndicalist union persecuted by Woodrow Wilson.

Keller's commitment to socialism stemmed from her experience as a disabled person and from her sympathy for others with handicaps. She began by working to simplify the alphabet for the blind, but soon came to realize that to deal solely with blindness was to treat symptom, not cause. Through research she learned that blindness was not distributed randomly throughout the population but was concentrated in the lower class. Men who were poor might be blinded in industrial accidents or by inadequate medical care; poor women who became prostitutes faced the additional danger of syphilitic blindness. Thus Always a voice for the voiceless. Helen Keller championed women's suffrage. Her position at the head of this 1912 demonstration shows her celebrity status as well as her commitment to the cause. The shields are all from Western states, where women were already voting.

Keller learned how the social class system controls people's opportunities in life, sometimes determining even whether they can see. Keller's research was not just book-learnIng; “I have visited sweatshops, factories, crowded slums. If I could notseeit,Icouldsmelli t . ” A tthetimeKellerbecameasocialist,shewasoneofthemostfamous women on the planet. She soon became the most notorious. Her conversion to socialism caused a new storm of publicitythis time outraged. Newspapers that had extolled her courage and intelligence now emphasized her handicap.

Columnists charged that she had no independent sensory

input and was in thrall to those who fed her information. Typical was the editor of the Brooklyn Eagle, who wrote that Keller's “mistakes spring out of the manifest limitations of her development.”

Keller recalled having met this editor: “At that time the compliments he paid me were so generous that I blush to remember them. But now that I have come out for socialism he reminds me and the public that I am blind and deaf and especially liable to error. I must have shrunk in intelligence during the years since I met him.” She went on, “Oh, ridiculous Brooklyn Eagle! Socially blind and deaf, it defends an intolerable system, a system that is the cause of much of the physical blindness and deafness which we are trying to prevent.”'

Keller, who devoted much of her later life to raising funds for the American Foundation for the Blind, never wavered in her belief that our society needed radical change. Having herself fought so hard to speak, she helped found the American Civil Liberties Union to fight for the free speech of others. She sent $100 to the NAACP with a letter of support that appeared in its magazine The Crisisa radical act for a white person from Alabama in the 1920s. She supported Eugene V Debs, the Socialist candidate, in each of his campaigns for the presidency. She composed essays on the women's movement, on politics, on economics. Near the end of her life, she wrote to Elizabeth Curley Flynn, leader of the American Communist party, who was then languishing in jail, a victim of the McCarthy era: "Loving birthday greetings, dear Elizabeth Flynn May the sense ofserving mankind bring strength and peace into your brave heart!

One may not agree with Helen Keller's positions. Her praise of the USSR now seems naive, embarrassing, to some even treasonous. But she was a radicala fact few Americans know, because our schooling and our mass media and left it out. What we did not learn about Woodrow Wilson is even more remarkable.

When I ask my college students to tell me what they recall about President Wilson, they respond with enthusiasm. They say that Wilson led our country Among the progressive-era reforms with which students often credit Woodrow Wilson is women's suffrage. Although women did receive the right to vote during Wilson's admin istration, the president was at first unsympathetic. He had suffragists arrested; his wife detested them. Public pressure, aroused by hunger strikes and

other actions of the movement, convinced Wilson that to oppose women's suffrage was politically unwise. Textbooks typically fail to show the interrelationship between the hero and the people. By giving the credit to the hero, authors tell less than half of the story.

reluctantly into World War I and after the war led the struggle nationally and internationally to establish the League of Nations. They associate Wilson with progressive causes like women's suffrage. A handful ofstudents recall the Wilson administration's Palmer Raids against left-wing unions. But my students seldom know or speak about two antidemocratic policies that Wilson carried out: his racial segregation of the federal government and his military interventions in foreign countries.

Under Wilson, the United States intervened in Latin America more often than at any other time in our history. We landed troops in Mexico in 1914, Haiti in 1915, the Dominican Republic in 1916, Mexico again in 1916 (and nine more times before the end of Wilson's presidency), Cuba in 1917, and Panama in 1918. Throughout his administration Wilson maintained forces in Nicaragua, using them to determine Nicaragua's president and to force passage of a treaty preferential to the United States.

In 1917 Woodrow Wilson took on a major power when he started sending secret monetary aid to the “White” side of the Russian civil war. In the summer of 1918 he authorized a naval blockade of the Soviet Union and sent expeditionary forces to Murmansk, Archangel, and Vladivostok to help overthrow the Russian Revolution. With the blessing of Britain and France, and in a joint command with Japanese soldiers, American forces penetrated westward from Vladivostok to Lake Baikal, supporting Czech and White Russian forces that had declared an anticommunist government headquartered at Omsk, After briefly maintaining front lines as far west as the Volga, the White Russian forces disintegrated by the end of 1919, and our troops finally left Vladivostok on April 1, 1920.'

Few Americans who were not alive at the time know anything about our “unknown war with Russia,” to quote the title of Robert Maddox's book on this fiasco. Not one of the twelve American history textbooks in my sample even mentions it. Russian history textbooks, on the other hand, give the episode considerable coverage. According to Maddox: “The immediate effect of the intervention was to

prolong a bloody civil war, thereby costing thousands of additional lives and wreaking enormous destruction on an already battered society. And there were longer-range implications. Bolshevik leaders had clear proof . . . that the Western powers meant to destroy the Soviet government if given the chance."[1]

This aggression fueled the suspicions that motivated the Soviets during the Cold War, and until its breakup the Soviet Union continued to claim damages for the invasion.

Wilson's invasions of Latin America are better known than his Russian adventure. Textbooks do cover some of them, and it is fascinating to watch textbook authors attempt to justify these episodes. Any accurate portrayal of the invasions could not possibly show Wilson or the United States in a favorable light. With hindsight we know that Wilson's interventions in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Nicaragua set the stage for the dictators Batista, Trujillo, the Duvaliers, and the Somozas, whose legacies still reverberate. Even in the 1910s, most of the invasions were unpopular in this country and provoked a torrent of criticism abroad. By the mid-1920s, Wilson's successors reversed his policies in Latin America. The authors of history textbooks know this, for a chapter or two after Wilson they laud our "Good Neighbor Policy," the renunciation of force in Latin America by Presidents Coolidge and Hoover, which was extended by Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Textbooks might (but don't) call Wilson's Latin American actions a "Bad Neighbor Policy" by comparison. Instead, faced with pleasantries, textbooks wriggle to get the hero off the hook, as in this example from The Challenge of Freedom: "President Wilson wanted the United States to build friendships with the countries of Latin America. However, he found this difficult. . . ." Some textbooks blame the invasions on the countries invaded: "Necessity was the mother of armed Caribbean intervention," states The American Pageant. Land ofPromise is vague as to who caused the invasions but seems certain they were not Wilson's doing: "He soon discovered that because of forces he could not control, his ideas of morality and idealism had to give way to practical action." Promise goes on to assert Wilson's innocence: "Thus, though he believed it morally undesirable to send Marines into the Caribbean, he saw no way to avoid it," This passage is sheer invention. Unlike his secretary of the navy, who later complained that what Wilson "forced [me] to do in Haiti was a bitter pill for me," no documentary evidence suggests that

Wilson suffered any such qualms about dispatching troops to the Caribbean.

All twelve of the textbooks I surveyed mention Wilson's 1914 invasion of Mexico, but they posit that the interventions were not Wilson's fault. “President Wilson was urged to send military forces into Mexico to protect American investments and to restore law and order,” according to Triumph ofthe American Nation, whose authors emphasize that the president at first chose not to intervene. But “as the months passed, even President Wilson began to lose patience.” Walter Karp has shown that this version contradicts the factsthe invasion was Wilson's idea from the start, and it outraged Congress as well as the American people. According to Karp, Wilson's intervention was so outrageous that leaders of both sides of Mexico's ongoing civil war demanded that the U.S. forces leave; the pressure of public opinion in the United States and around the world finally influenced Wilson to recall the troops.

Textbook authors commonly use another device when describing our Mexican adventures: they identify Wilson as ordering our forces to withdraw, but nobody is specified as having ordered them in! Imparting information in a passive voice helps to insulate historical figures from their own unheroic or unethical deeds.

Some books go beyond omitting the actor and leave out the act itself. Half of the twelve textbooks do not even mention Wilson's takeover of Haiti. After U.S. marines invaded the country in 1915, they forced the Haitian legislature to select our preferred candidate as president. When Haiti refused to declare war on Germany after the United States did, we dissolved the Haitian legislature. Then the United States supervised a pseudo-referendum to approve a new Haitian constitution, less democratic than the constitution it replaced;

the referendum passed by a hilarious 98,225 to 768. As Piero Gleijesus has noted, “It is not that Wilson failed in his earnest efforts to bring democracy to these little countries. He never tried. He intervened to impose hegemony, not democracy.” The United States also attacked Haiti's proud tradition of individualownershipofsmalltractsofland,whichdatedhacktotheHaitianRe forced peasants in shackles to work on road construction crews. In 1919 Haitian citizens rose up and resisted U.S. occupation troops in a guerrilla war that cost more than

3,000 lives, most of them Haitian. Students who read Triumph of tbe American Nation learn this about Wilson's intervention in Haiti: “Neither the treaty nor the continued presence of American troops restored order completely. During the nest four or five years, nearly 2,000 Haitians were killed in riots and other outbreaks of violence.” This passive construction veils the circumstances about which George Barnett, a U.S. marine general, complained to his commander in Haiti: “Practically indiscriminate killing of natives has gone on for some time.” Barnett termed this violent episode “the most startling thing of its kind that has ever taken place in the Marine Corps.”

During the first two decades of this century, the United States effectively made colonies of Nicaragua, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and several other countries. Wilson's reaction to the Russian Revolution solidified the alignment of the United States with Europe's colonial powers. His was the first administration to be obsessed with the specter of communism, abroad and at home. Wilson was blunt about it. In Billings, Montana, stumping the West to seek support for the League of Nations, he warned, “There are apostles of Lenin in our own midst. I can not imagine what it means to be an apostle of Lenin, It means to be an apostle of the night, of chaos, of disorder.” Even after the White Russian alternative collapsed, Wilson refused to extend diplomatic recognition to the Soviet Union, He participated in barring Russia from the peace negotiations after World War 1 and helped oust Bela Kun, the communist leader who had risen to power in Hungary. Wilson's sentiment for selfdetermination and democracy never had a chance against his three bedrock “ism”s: colonialism, racism, and anticommunism. A young Ho Chi Minh appealed to Woodrow Wilson at Versailles for self-determination for Vietnam, but Ho had all three strikes against him. Wilson refused to listen, and France retained control of Indochina. It seems that Wilson regarded self-determination as all right for, say, Belgium, but not for the likes of Latin America or Southeast Asia.

t At home, Wilson's racial policies disgraced the office he held. His Republican predecessors had routinely appointed blacks to important offices, including those of port collector for New Orleans and the District of Columbia and register of the treasury. Presidents sometimes appointed African Americans as postmasters, particularly in southern towns

with large black populations. African Americans took part in the Republican Party's national conventions and enjoyed some access to the White House. Woodrow Wilson, for whom many African Americans voted in 1912, changed all that. A southerner, Wilson had been president of Princeton, the only major northern university that refused to admit blacks. He was an outspoken white supremacisthis wife was even worseand told “darky” stories in cabinet meetings. His administration submitted a legislative program intended to curtail the civil rights of African Americans, but Congress would not pass it. Unfazed, Wilson used his power as chief executive to segregate the federal government. He appointed southern whites to offices traditionally reserved for blacks. Wilson personally vetoed a clause on racial equality in the Covenant of the League of Nations. The one occasion on which Wilson met with African American leaders in the White House ended in a fiasco as the president virtually threw the visitors out of his office. Wilson's legacy was extensive: he effectively closed the Democratic Party to African Americans for another two decades, and parts of the federal government remained segregated into the 1950s and beyond.“ In 1916 the Colored Advisory Committee of the Republican National Committee issued a statement on Wilson that, though partisan, was accurate: ”No sooner had the Democratic Administration come into power than Mr. Wilson and his advisors entered upon a policy to eliminate all colored citizens from representation in the Federal Government.

Of the twelve history textbooks I reviewed, only four accurately describe Wilson's racial policies. Land ofPromise does the best job:

Woodrow Wilson's administration was openly hostile to black people. Wilson was an outspoken white supremacist who believed thai black people were inferior. During his campaign for the presidency, Wilson promised to press for civil rights. But once in office he forgot his promises. Instead, Wilson ordered that white and black workers in federal government jobs be segregated from one another. This was the first time such segregation had existed since ReconstructionI When black federal employees in Southern cities protested the order, Wilson had the protesters fired. In November, 1914, a black delegation asked the President to reverse his policies. Wilson was rude and hostile and refused their demands.

Unfortunately, except for one other textbook, The United SlatesA History of the Republic, Promise stands alone. Most of the textbooks that treat Wilson's racism give it only a sentence or two Five of the books never even mention this “black mark” on Wilson's presidency. One that does. The American Way, does something even more astonishing: it invents a happy ending! “Those in favor of segregation finally lost support in the administration. Their policies gradually were ended.” This is simply not true.

Omitting or absolving Wilson's racism goes beyond concealing a character blemish. It is overtly racist. No black person could ever consider Woodrow Wilson a hero. Textbooks that present him as a hero are written from a white perspective. The coverup denies all students the chance to learn something important about the interrelationship between the leader and the led. White Americans engaged in a new burst of racial violence during and immediately after Wilson's presidency. The tone set by the administration was one cause. Another was the release of America's first epic motion picture.

The filmmaker David W. Griffith quoted Wilson's two-volume history of the United States, now notorious for its racist view of Reconstruction, in his infamous masterpiece The Clansman, a paean to the Ku Klux Klan for its role in putting down “black-dominated” Republican state governments during Reconstruction. Griffith based the movie on a book by Wilson's former classmate, Thomas Dixon, whose obsession with race was “unrivaled until Mein Kampf.” At a private White House showing, Wilson saw the movie, now retitled Birth ofa Nation, and returned Griffith's compliment: “It is like writing history with lightning, and my only regret is that it is all so true.” Griffith would go on to use this quotation in successfully defending his film against NAACP charges that it was racially inflammatory.

This landmark of American cinema was not only the best technical production of its time but also probably the most racist major movie of all time. Dixon intended “to revolutionize northern sentiment by a presentation of history that would transform every man in my audience into a good Democrat! . . . And make no mistake about itwe are doing just that.”' Dixon did not overstate by much. Spurred by Birth of a Nation, William Simmons of Georgia reestablished the Ku Klux Klan. The racism seeping down from the White House encouraged this Klan, distinguishing it from its

Reconstruction prede cessor, which President Grant had succeeded in virtually eliminating in one state (South Carolina) and discouraging nationally for a time. The new KKK quickly became a national phenomenon. It grew to dominate the Democratic Party in many southern states, as well as in Indiana, Oklahoma, and Oregon. During Wilson's second term, a wave of antiblack race riots swept the country. Whites lynched blacks as far north as Duluth.

If Americans had learned from the Wilson era the connection between racist presidential leadership and like-minded public response, they might not have put up with a reprise on a far smaller scale during the Reagan-Bush years.“ To accomplish such education, however, textbooks would have to make plain the relationship between cause and effect, between hero and followers. Instead, they reflexively ascribe noble intentions to the hero and invoke ”the people“ to excuse questionable actions and policies. According to Triumph of the American Nation: ”As President, Wilson seemed to agree with most white Americans that segregation was in the best interests of black as well as white Americans.

Wilson was not only antiblack; he was also far and away our most nativist president, repeatedly questioning the loyalty of those he called “hyphenated Americans,” “Any man who carries a hyphen about with him,” said Wilson, “carries a dagger that he is ready to plunge into the vitals of this Republic whenever he gets ready.” The American people responded to Wilson's lead with a wave of repression of white ethnic groups; again, most textbooks blame the people, not Wilson. The American Tradition admits that “President Wilson set up” the Creel Committee on Public Information, which saturated the United States with propaganda linking Germans to barbarism. But Tradition hastens to shield Wilson from the ensuing domestic fallout: “Although President Wilson had been careful in his war message to state that most Americans of German descent were 'true and loyal citizens,' the anti-German propaganda often caused them suffering.”

Wilson displayed little regard for the rights of anyone whose opinions differed from his own. But textbooks take pains to insulate him from wrongdoing. “Congress,” not Wilson, is credited with having passed the Espionage Act ofJune 1917 and the Sedition Act of the following year, probably the most serious attacks on the civil liberties of Americans since the short-lived Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798. In fact, Wilson tried to strengthen the Espionage Act

with a provision giving broad censorship powers directly to the president. Moreover, with Wilson's approval, his postmaster general used his new censorship powers to suppress all mail that was socialist, anti-British, pro-Irish, or that in any other way might, in his view, have threatened the war effort. Robert Goldstein served ten years in prison for producing The Spirit of '76, a film about the Revolutionary War To oppose America's participation in World War I. or even to be pessimistic about ft, was dangerous. The Creel Committee asked all Americans to “report the man who . . . cries for peace, or belittles our efforts to win the war.” Send their names to the Justice Depart ment in Washington, it exhorted. After World War I, the Wilson administration's attacks on civil liberties increased, now with anticommunisrn as the excuse. Neither before nor since these campaigns has the United States come closer to being a police state.

that depicted the British, who were now our allies, unfavorably. Textbook authors suggest that wartime pressures excuse Wilson's suppression of civil liberties, but in 1920, when World War 1 was long over, Wilson vetoed a bill that would have abolished the Espionage and Sedition acts. Textbook authors blame the anticomrnutist and antilabor union witch hunts of Wilson's second term on his illness and on an attorney general run amok. No evidence supports this view Indeed, Attorney General Palmer asked Wilson in his last days as president to pardon Eugene V. Debs, who was serving time for a speech attributing World War I to economic interests and denouncing the Espionage Act as undemocratic,“ The president replied, ”Never!“ and Debs languished in prison until Warren Harding pardoned him. The American Way adopts perhaps the most innovative approach to absolving Wilson of wrongdoing; Way simply moves the ”red scare" to the 1920s, after Wilson had left office!

Because heroideation prevents textbooks from showing Wilson's shortcomings, textbooks are hard pressed to explain the results of the 1920 election. James Cox, the Democratic candidate who was Wilson's would-be successor, was crushed by the nonentity Warren G. Harding, who never even campaigned, In the biggest landslide in the history of American presidential politics, Harding got almost 64 percent of the major-party votes. The people were “tired,” textbooks suggest, and just warned a “return to normalcy.” The possibility that the electorate knew what it was doing in

rejecting Wilson never occurs to our authors. It occurred to Helen Keller, however. She called Wilson “the greatest individual disappointment the world has ever known!”

It isn't only high school history courses that heroify Wilson. Textbooks such as Land ofPromise, which discusses Wilson's racism, have to battle uphill, for they struggle against the archetypal Woodrow Wilson commemorated in so many history museums, public television documentaries, and historical novels.

For some years now, Michael Frisch has been conducting an experiment in social archetypes at the State University of New York at Buffalo. He asks his first-year college students for “the first ten names that you think of” in American history before the Civil War. When Frisch found that his students listed the same political and military figures year after year, replicating the privileged positions afforded them in high school textbooks, he added the proviso, “excluding presidents, generals, statesmen, etc” Frisch still gets a stable list, but one less predictable on the basis of history textbooks. Seven years out of eight, Betsy Ross has led the list. (Paul Revere usually comes in second.)

What is interesting about this choice is that Betsy Ross never did anything. Frisch notes that she played "no role whatsoever in the actual creation of any actual first flag.“ Ross came to prominence around 1876, when some of her descendants, seeking to create a tourist attraction in Philadelphia, largely invented the myth of the first flag. With justice, high school textbooks universally ignore Betsy Ross; not one of my twelve books lists her in its index. So how and why does her story get transmitted? Frisch offers a hilarious explanation: If George Washington is the Father of Our Country, then Betsy Ross is our Blessed Virgin Mary! Frisch describes the pageants reenacted (or did we only imagine them?) in our elementary school years: ”Washington [the god] calls on the humble seamstress Betsy Ross in her tiny home and asks her if she will make the nation's flag, to his design. And Betsy promptly brings forthfrom her lap!the nation itself, and the promise of freedom and natural rights for all mankind.

[think Frisch is onto something, but maybe he is merely on something. Whether or not one buys his explanation, Betsy Ross's ranking among students surely proves the power of the social archetype. In the case of Woodrow Wilson, textbooks actually participate in creating the social

archetype. Wilson is portrayed as “good,” “idealist,” “for self-determination, not colonial intervention,” “foiled by an isolationist Senate,” and “ahead of his time.” We name institutions after him, from the Woodrow Wilson Center at the Smithsonian Institution to Woodrow Wilson Junior High School in Decatur, Illinois, where I misspent my adolescence. If a fifth face were to be chiseled into Mount Rushmore, many Americans would propose that it should be Wilson's." Against such archetypal goodness, even the unusually forthright treatment of Wilson's racism in Land of Promise cannot but fail to stick in students' minds. Curators of history museums know that their visitors bring archetypes in with them. Some curators consciously design exhibits to confront these archetypes when they are inaccurate. Textbook authors, teachers, and moviemakers would better fulfill their educational mission if they also taught against inaccurate archetypes. Surely Woodrow Wilson does not need their flattering omissions, after all. His progressive legislative accomplishments in just his first two years, including tariff reform, an income tax, the Federal Reserve Act, and the Workingmen's Compensation Act, are almost unparalleled, Wilson's speeches on behalf of self-determination stirred the world, even if his actions did not live up to his words.

Why do textbooks promote wartless stereotypes? The authors' omissions and errors can hardly be accidental. The producers of the filmstrips, movies, and other educational materials on Helen Keller surely know she was a socialist; no one can read Keller's writings without becoming aware of her political and This statue of George Washington, now in the Smithsonian Institution, exemplifies the manner in which textbooks would portray every American hero; ten feet tall, blemish-free, with the body of a Greek god.

social philosophy. At least one textbook author. Thomas Bailey, senior author of The American Pageant, clearly knew of the 1918 U.S. invasion of Russia, for he wrote in a different venue in 1973, “American troops shot it out with Russian armed forces on Russian soil in two theatres from 1918 to 1920.”' Probably several other authors knew of it, too. Wilson's racism is also well known to professional historians. Why don't they let the public in on these matters? Heroification itself supplies a first answer. Socialism is repugnant to most Americans. So are racism and colonialism. Michael Kammen suggests that authors selectively omit blemishes in order to make certain historical figures

sympathetic to as many people as possible. The textbook critic Norma Gabler has testified that textbooks should "present our nation's patriots in a way that would honor and respect them"; in her eyes, admitting Keller's socialism and Wilson's racism would hardly do that," In the early 1920s the American Legion said that authors of textbooks "are at fault in placing before immature pupils the blunders, foibles and frailties of prominent heroes and patriots of our Nation." The Legion would hardly be able to fault today's history textbooks on this count. Perhaps we can go further. I began with Helen Keller because omitting the last sixty-four years of her life exemplifies the sort of culture-serving distortion that will be discussed later in this book. We teach Keller as an ideal, not a real person, to inspire our young people to emulate her. Keller becomes a mythic figure, the "woman who overcame"but for what? There is no content! Jus[look what she accomplished, we're exhortedyet we haven't a clue as to what that really was.

Keller did not want to be frozen in childhood. She herself stressed that the meaning of her life lay in what she did once she overcame her disability. In 1929, when she was nearing fifty, she wrote a second volume of autobiography, entitled Midstream, that described her social philosophy in some detail. Keller wrote about visiting mill towns, mining towns, and packing towns where workers were on strike. She intended that we learn of these experiences and of the conclusions to which they led her. Consistent with our American ideology of individualism, the truncated version of Helen Keller's story sanitizes a hero, leaving only the virtues of self-help and hard work. Keller herself, while scarcely opposing hard work, explicitly rejected this ideology.

I had once believed that we were all masters ofour fatethat we could mould our lives into any form we pleased. . . . I had overcome deafness and blindness sufficiently to be happy, and I supposed that anyone could come out victorious if he threw himself valiantly into life's struggle. But as I went more and more about the country I learned that I had spoken with assurance on a subject I knew little about. I forgot that I owed my success partly the advantages of my birth and environment. . . . Now, however, I learned that the power to rise in the world is not within the reach of everyone.

Textbooks don't want to touch this idea. "There are three great taboos in textbook publishing," an editor at one of the biggest houses told me, "sex, religion, and social class."

While I had been able to guess the first two, the third floored me. Sociologists know the importance of social class, after all. Reviewing American history textbooks convinced me that this editor was right, however. The notion that opportunity might be unequal in America, that not everyone has “the power to rise in the world,” is anathema to textbook authors, and to many teachers as well. Educators would much rather present Keller as a bland source of encouragement and inspiration to our youngif she can do it, you can do it! So they leave out her adult life and make her entire existence over into a vague “up by the bootstraps” operation. In the process, they make this passionate fighter for the poor into something she never was in life: boring.

Woodrow Wilson gets similarly whitewashed. Although some history textbooks disclose more than others about the seamy underside of Wilson's presidency, all twelve books reviewed share a common tone; respectful, patriotic, even adulatory. Ironically, Wilson was widely despised in the 1920s, and it was only after World War II that he came to be viewed kindly by policymakers and historians. Our postwar bipartisan foreign policy, one of far-reaching interventions sheathed in humanitarian explanations, was “shaped decisively by the ideology and the international program developed by the Wilson Administration,” according to N. Gordon Levin, Jr." Textbook authors are thus motivated to underplay or excuse Wilson's foreign interventions, many of which were counterproductive blunders, as well as other unsatisfactory aspects of his administration.

A host of other reasons-pressure from the “ruling class,” pressure from textbook adoption committees, the wish to avoid ambiguities, a desire to shield children from harm or conflict, the perceived need to control children and avoid classroom disharmony, pressure to provide answersmay help explain why textbooks omit troublesome facts, A certain etiquette coerces us all into speaking in respectful tones about the past, especially when we're passing on Our Heritage to our young. Could it be that we don't wait to think badly of Woodrow Wilson? We seem to feel that a person like Helen Keller can be an inspiration only so long as she remains uncontroversial, one-dimensional. We don't want complicated icons. “People do not like to think. If one thinks, one must reach conclusions,” Helen Keller pointed out. “Conclusions are not always pleasant,” Most of us automatically shy away from conflict, and understandably so.

We particularly seek to avoid conflict in the classroom. One reason is habit: we are so accustomed to bland ness that the textbook or teacher who brought real intellectual controversy into the classroom would strike us as a violation of polite rhetoric, of classroom norms. We are supposed to speak well of the deceased, after all. Probably we are supposed to maintain the same attitude of awe, reverence, and respect when we read about our national heroes as when we visit our National Cathedral and view the final resting places of Helen Keller and Woodrow Wilson, as close physically in death as they were distant ideologically in life.

Whatever the causes, the results of Heroification are potentially crippling to students. Helen Keller is not the only person this approach treats like a child. Denying students the humanness of Keller, Wilson, and others keeps students in intellectual immaturity. It perpetuates what might be called a Disney version of history: The Hall of Presidents at Disneyland similarly presents our leaders as heroic statesmen, not imperfect human beings. Our children end up without realistic role models to inspire them. Students also develop no understanding of causality in history. Our nation's thirteen separate forays into Nicaragua, for instance, are surely worth knowing about as we attempt to understand why that country embraced a communist government in the 1980s. Textbooks should show history as contingent, affected by the power of ideas and individuals. Instead, they present history as a “done deal.”

Do textbooks, filmstrips, and American history courses achieve the results they seek with regard to our heroes? Surely textbook authors want us to think well of the historical figures they treat with such sympathy. And, on a superficial level at least, we do. Almost no recent high school graduates have anything “bad” to say about either Keller or Wilson. But are these two considered heroes? I have asked hundreds of {mostly white) college students on the first day of class to tell me who their heroes in American history are. As a rule, they do not pick Helen Keller, Woodrow Wilson, Christopher Columbus, Miles Standish or anyone else in Plymouth, John Smith or anyone else in Virginia, Abraham Lincoln, or indeed anyone else in American history whom the textbooks implore them to choose. Our post-Watergate students view all such “establishment” heroes cynically. They're bor-r-ring.

Some students choose “none”that is, they say they have

no heroes in American history. Other students display the characteristically American sympathy for the underdog by choosing African Americans: Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, perhaps Rosa Parks, Harriet Tubman, or Frederick Douglass. Or they choose men and women from other countries: Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, or (now fading fast) Mikhail Gorbachev or Boris Yeltsin.

In one sense this is a healthy development. Surely we want students to be skeptical. Probably we want them to challenge being told whom to believe in. But replying "none" is too glib, too nihilistic, for my taste. It is, however, an understandable response to heroification. For when textbook authors leave out the warts, the problems, the unfortunate character traits, and the mistaken ideas, they reduce heroes from dramatic men and women to melodramatic stick figures. Their inner struggles disappear and they become goody-goody, not merely good.

Students poke fun at the goody-goodiest of them all by passing on Helen Keller jokes. In so doing, schoolchildren are not poking cruel fun at a disabled person, they are deflating a pretentious symbol that is too good to be real. Nonetheless, our loss of Helen Keller as anything but a source of jokes is distressing. Knowing the reality of her quite amazing life might empower not only deaf or blind students, but any schoolgirl, and perhaps boys as well. For like other peoples around the world, we Americans need heroes. Statements such as "If Martin Luther King were alive, he'd . . ." suggest one function of historical figures in our contemporary society. Most of us tend to think well of ourselves when we have acted as we imagine our heroes might have done. Who our heroes are and whether they are presented in a way that makes them lifelike, hence usable as role models, could have a significant bearing on our conduct in the world.

We now turn to our first hero, Christopher Columbus. "Care should be taken to vindicate great names from pernicious erudition," wrote Washington Irving, defending heroification. Irving's three-volume biography of Columbus, published in 1828, still influences what high school teachers and textbooks say about the Great Navigator. Therefore it will come as no surprise that heroification has stolen from us the important facets of his life, leaving only melodramatic minutiae.

Columbus is above all the figure with whom the Modern Agethe age by which we may delineate these past 500

yearsproperly begins, and in his character as in his exploits we are given an extraordinary insight into the patterns that shaped the age at its start and still for trie most part shape it today.

Kirkpatrick Sale As a subject for research, the possibility of African discovery of America has never been a tempting one for American historians. In a sense, we choose our own history, or more accurately, we select those vistas of history for our examinations which promise us the greatest satisfaction, and we have had little appetite to explore the possibility that our founding father was a black man.

History is the polemics of the victor.

Samuel D. Marble William F. Buckley, Jr.

What we committed in the Indies stands out among the most unpardonable offenses ever committed against God and mankind and this trade [in Indian slaves] as one of the most unjust, evil, and cruel among them.

In fourteen hundred and ninety-three, Columbus stole all he could see.

Bartolome de las Casas Traditional verse, updated

Lies My Teacher Told Me

2. 1493: The True Importance of Christopher Columbus

In fourteen hundred and ninety-two, Christopher Columbus sailed in from the blue. American history books present Columbus pretty much without precedent, and they portray him as America's first great hero. In so canonizing him, they reflect our national culture. Indeed, now that President's Day has combined Washington's and Lincoln's birthdays, Columbus is one of only two people the United States honors by name in a national holiday. The one date that every school child remembers is 1492, and sure enough, all twelve textbooks I surveyed include it. But they leave out virtually everything that is important to know about Columbus and the European exploration of the Americas. Mean while, they make up all kinds of details to tell a better story and to humanize Columbus so that readers will identify with him.

Columbus, like Christ, was so pivotal that historians use him to divide the past into epochs, making the Americas before 1492 “pre-Columbian.” American history textbooks recognize Columbus's importance by granting him an average of eight hundred wordstwo and a half pages including a picture and a map a lot of space, considering all the material these books must cover. Their heroic collective account goes something like this:

Born in Genoa, Italy, of humble parents, Christopher Columbus grew up to become an experienced seafarer. He sailed the Atlantic as far as Iceland and West Africa. His adventures convinced him that the world must be round. Therefore the fabled riches of the Eastspices, silk, and goldcould be had by sailing west, superseding the overland route through the Middle East, which the Turks had closed off to commerce.

To get funding for his enterprise, Columbus beseeched monarch after monarch in western Europe, After at first being dismissed by Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, Columbus finally got his chance when Queen Isabella decided to underwrite a modest expedition.

An early draft of this chapter formed the basis of The Truth about Columbus, a “poster hook” for high school students and teachers (New York: The New Press, 1992).

Columbus outfitted three pitifully small ships, the Nina, the Pinto, and the Santa Maria, and set forth from Spain. The journey was difficult. The ships sailed west into the unknown Atlantic for more than two months. The crew almost mutinied and threatened to throw Columbus overboard. Finally they reached the West Indies on October 12, 1492.

Although Columbus made three more voyages to America, he never really knew he had discovered a New World. He died in obscurity, unappreciated and penniless. Yet without his daring American history would have been very different, for in a sense Columbus made it all possible.

Unfortunately, almost everything in this traditional account is either wrong or unverifiable. The authors of history textbooks have taken us on a trip of their own, away from the facts of history, into the realm of myth. They and we have been duped by an outrageous concoction of lies, half-truths, truths, and omissions, that is in large part traceable to the first half of the nineteenth century.

The textbooks' first mistake is to underplay previous explorers. People from other continents had reached the Americas many times before 1492. Even if Columbus had never sailed, other Europeans would have soon reached the Americas. Indeed, Europeans may already have been fishing off Newfoundland in the 1480s. In a sense Columbus's voyage was not the first but the last “discovery” of the Americas. It was epoch-making because of the way in which Europe responded. Columbus's importance is therefore primarily attributable to changing conditions in Europe, not to his having reached a “new” continent.

American history textbooks seem to understand the need to cover social changes in Europe in the years leading up to 1492. They point out that history passed the Vikings by and devote several pages to the reasons Europe was ready this time “to take advantage of the discovery” of America, as one textbook puts it. Unfortunately, none of the textbooks provides substantive analysis of the major changes that prompted the new response.

All but one of the twelve books I examined begin the Columbus story with Marco Polo and the Crusades. (American Adventures starts simply with Columbus.) Here Is their composite account of what was happening in Europe:

“Life in Europe was slow paced.” “Curiosity about the rest of the world was at a low point.” Then, “many changes took place in Europe during the 500 years before Columbus's discovery of the Americas in 1492,”

“People's horizons gradually widened, and they became more curious about the world beyond their own localities.” “Europe was stirring with new ideas. Many Europeans were filled with burning curiosity. They were living in a period called the Renaissance.” “What started Europeans thinking new thoughts and dreaming new dreams? A series of wars called the Crusades were partly responsible.” “The Crusades caused great changes in the ways that Europeans thought and acted.” “The desire for more trade quickly spread.” “The old trade routes to Asia had always been very difficult.”

The accounts resemble each other closely. Sometimes different textbooks even use the same phrases. Overall, the level of scholarship is discouragingly low, perhaps because their authors are more at home in American history than European history. They provide no real causal explanations for the age of European conquest. Instead, they argue for Europe's greatness in transparently psychological terms“people grew more curious.” Such arguments make sociologists smile: we know that nobody measured the curiosity level in Spain in 1492 or can with authority compare it to the curiosity level in, say, Norway or Iceland in 1005.

Here is the account in The American Way.

What made these Europeans so daring was their belief in themselves. The people of Europe believed that human beings were the highest form of life on earth. This was the philosophy, or belief, of humanism. It was combined with a growing interest in technology or tools and their uses. The Europeans believed that by using their intelligence, they could develop new ways to do things.

This is not the place to debate the precepts or significance of humanism, a philosophical movement that clashed with orthodox Catholicism. In any case, humanism can hardly explain Columbus, since he and his royal sponsors were devout orthodox Catholics, not humanists. The American Way tells us, nonetheless, that Columbus “had the humanist's belief that people could do anything if they knew enough and tried hard enough.” This is Columbus as the Little Engine That Could!

Several textbooks claim that Europe was becoming richer

and that the new wealth led to more trade. Actually, as the historian Angus Calder has pointed out, “Europe was smaller and poorer in the fifteenth century than it had been in the thirteenth,” owing in part to the bubonic plague.

Some teachers still teach what their predecessors taught me forty years ago: that Europe needed spices to disguise the taste of bad meat, but the bad Turks cut off the spice trade. Three booksThe American Tradition, Land of Promise, and The American Wayrepeat this falsehood. In the words of Land of Promise, “Then, after 1453, when Constantinople fell to the Turks, trade with the East all but stopped.” But A. H. Lybyer disproved this statement in 1915! Turkey had nothing to do with the development ofnew routes to the Indies. On the contrary, the Turks had every reason to keep the old Eastern Mediterranean route open, since they made money from it.

In 1957 Jacques Barzun and Henry Graff published a book that has become a standard treatise for graduate students of history, The Modem Researcher, in which they pointed out how since 1915 textbooks have perpetuated this particular error. Probably several of the half-dozen authors of the offending textbooks encountered The Modern Researcher in graduate school. Somehow the information did not stick, though. This may be because blaming Turks fits with the West's archetypal conviction that followers of“ Islam are likely to behave irrationally or nastily. In proposing that Congress declare Columbus Day a national holiday in 1963, Rep. Roland Libonati put it this way: ”His Christian faith gave to him a religious incentive to thwart the piratical activities of the Turkish marauders preying upon the trading ships of the Christian world." TheAmericanTradition,LandofPromise,andTheAmericanWaycontinueto reinforce this archetype of a vaguely threatening Islam. College students today are therefore astonished to learn that Turks and Moors allowed Jews and Christians freedom of worship at a time when European Christians tortured or expelled |ews and Muslims. Not a single textbook tells that the Portuguese fleet in 1507 blocked the Red Sea and Persian Gulf to stop trade along the old route, because Portugal controlled the new route, around Africa.

Most textbooks note the increase in international trade and commerce, and some relate the rise ofnation-states under monarchies. Otherwise, they do a poor job of describing the changes in Europe that led to the Age of Exploration. Some

textbooks even invoke the Protestant Reformation, although it didn't begin until twenty-five years after 1492!

What is going on here? We must pay attention to what the textbooks are telling us and what they are riot telling us. The changes in Europe not only prompted Columbus's voyages and the probable contemporaneous trips to America by Portuguese, Basque, and Bristol fishermen, but they also paved the way for Europe's domination of the world for the next five hundred years. Except for the invention ofagriculture, this was probably the most consequential development in human history. Our history books ought to discuss seriously what happened and why, instead of supplying vague, nearly circular pronouncements such as this, from TheAmerican Tradition: “Interest in practical matters and the world outside Europe led to advances in shipbuilding and navigation.”

Perhaps foremost among the significant factors the textbooks leave out are advances in military technology. Around 1400, European rulers began to commission ever bigger guns and learned to mount them on ships. Europe's incessant wars gave rise to this arms race, which also ushered in refinements in archery, drill, and siege warfare, China, the Ottoman Empire, and other nations in Asia and Africa now fell prey to European arms, and in 1493 the Americas began to succumb as well.

We live with this arms race still. Since the demise of the Soviet Union, the nuclear arms race may have come to a temporary resting point. But the West's advantage in military technology over the test of the world, jealously maintained from the 1400s on, remains very much contested. Western nations continue to try to keep non-Western nations disadvantaged in military technology. Just as the thirteen British colonies tried to outlaw the sale of guns to Native Americans, the United States now tries to outlaw the sale of nuclear technology to Third World countries. Since money is to be made in the arms trade, however, and since all nations need military allies, the arms trade with non-Western nations persists. The Western advantage in military technology is still a burning issue. Nonetheless, not a single textbook mentions arms as a cause of European world domination.

In the years before Columbus's voyages, Europe also expanded the use of new forms of social technologybureaucracy, double-entry bookkeeping, and mechanical printing. Bureaucracy, which today has negative

connotations, was actually a practical innovation that allowed rulers and merchants to manage farflung enterprises efficiently. So did double-entry bookkeeping, based on the decimal system, which Europeans first picked up from Arab traders. The printing press and increased literacy allowed news of Columbus's findings to travel across Europe much farther and faster than news of the Vikings' expeditions.

A third important development was ideological or even theological: amassing wealth and dominating other people came to be positively valued as the key means of winning esteem on earth and salvation in the hereafter. As Columbus put it, “Gold is most excellent; gold constitutes treasure; and he who has it does all he wants in the world, and can even lift souls up to Paradise.”10 In 1005 the Vikings intended only to settle Vineland, their name for New England or, more likely, the maritime provinces of Canada. By 1493 Columbus planned to plunder Haiti. The sources are perfectly clear about Columbus's motivation: in 1495, for instance, Michele de Cuneo wrote about accompanying Columbus on his 1494 expedition into the interior of Haiti “After we had rested for several days in our settlement, it seemed to the Lord Admiral that it was time to put into execution his desire to search for gold, which was the main reason he had started on so great a voyage full of so many dangers,”12 Columbus was no greedier than the Spanish, or later the English and French. But textbooks downplay the pursuit of wealth as a motive for coming to the Americas when they describe Columbus and later explorers and colonists. Even the Pilgrims left Europe partly to make money, but you would never know it from our textbooks. Their authors apparently believe that to have America explored and colonized for economic gain is somehow undignified.

A fourth factor affecting Europe's readiness to embrace a “new” continent was the particular nature of European Christianity. Europeans believed in a transportable, proselytizing religion that rationalized conquest. (Followers of Islam share this characteristic.) Typically, after “discovering” an island and encountering a tribe of Indians new to them, the Spaniards would read aloud (in Spanish) what came to be called “the Requirement.” Here is one version:

I implore you to recognize the Church as a lady and in the name of the Pope take the King as lord of this land and obey his mandates. If you do not do it, I tell you that with the help

of God I will enter powerfully against you all. I will make war everywhere and every way that I can. I will subject you to the yoke and obedience to the Church and to his majesty. I will take your women and children and make them slaves. . . . The deaths and injuries that you will receive from here on will be your own fault and not that of his majesty nor of the gentlemen that accompany me.

Having thus satisfied their consciences by offering the Indians a chance to convert to Christianity, the Spaniards then felt free to do whatever they wanted with the people they had just "discovered."

A fifth development that caused Europe's reaction to Columbus's reports about Haiti to differ radically from reactions to earlier expeditions was Europe's recent success in taking over and exploiting various island societies. On Malta, Sardinia, the Canary Islands, and, later, in Ireland, Europeans learned that conquest of this sort was a route to wealth. In addition, new and more deadly forms of smallpox and bubonic plague had arisen in Europe since the Vikings had sailed. Passed on to those the Europeans met, these diseases helped Europe conquer the Americas and, later, the islands of the Pacific.' Except for one paragraph on disease in The American Pageant, not one of the twelve textbooks mentions either of these factors as contributing to European world dominance.

Why don't textbooks mention arms as a facilitator of exploration and domination? Why don't they treat any of the foregoing factors? If crude factors such as military power or religiously sanctioned greed are perceived as reflecting badly on us, who exactly is "us"? Who are the textbooks written for (and by)? Plainly, descendants of the Europeans.

High school students don't usually think about the rise of Europe to world domination. It is rarely presented as a question. It seems natural, a given, not something that needs to be explained. Deep down, our culture encourages us to imagine that we are richer and more powerful because we're smarter. Of course, there are no studies showing Americans to be more intelligent than, say, Iraqis. Still, since textbooks don't identify or encourage us to think about the real causes, "we're smarter" festers as a possibility. Also left festering is the notion that "it's natural" for one group to dominate another,15 While history brims with examples of national domination, it also is full of counterexamples. The contact between Norse and Indians around 1000 A.D., for example,

though mostly unfriendly, was not marked by domination. The triracial Native American societies that developed after 1492from Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, through Florida to Ecuadoralso offer evidence that domination is not natural but cultural.

The way American history textbooks treat Columbus reinforces the tendency not to think about the process of domination. The traditional picture of Columbus landing on the American shore shows him dominating immediately, and this is based on fact; Columbus claimed everything he saw right off the boat. When textbooks celebrate this process, they imply that taking the land and dominating the Indians was inevitable if not natural. This is unfortunate, because Columbus's voyages constitute a splendid teachable moment. As official missions of a nation-state, they exemplify the new Europe. Merchants and rulers collaborated to finance and authorize them. The second expedition was heavily armed. Columbus carefully documented the voyages, including directions, currents, shoals, and descriptions of the Indians as ripe for subjugation. Thanks to the printing press, detailed news of Haiti and later conquests spread swiftly. Columbus had personal experience of the Atlantic islands recently taken over by Portugal and Spain, as well as with the slave trade in West Africa. Most important, his purpose from the beginning was not mere exploration or even trade,

but conquest and exploitation, for which he used religion as a rationale. If textbooks included these facts, they might induce students to think intelligently about why the West dominates the world today.

The textbooks concede that Columbus did not start from scratch. Every textbook account of the European exploration of the Americas begins with Prince Henry the Navigator, of Portugal, between 1415 and 1460. Henry is portrayed as discovering Madeira and the Azores and sending out ships to circumnavigate Africa for the first time. The textbook authors seem unaware that ancient Phoenicians and Egyptians sailed at least as far as Ireland and England, reached Madeira and the Azores, traded with the aboriginal inhabitants of the Canary Islands, and sailed all the way around Africa before 600 B.C. Instead, the textbooks credit Bartolomeu Dias with being the first to round the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa in 1488. Omitting the accomplishments of the AfroPhoenicians is ironic, because it was Prince Henry's knowledge of their feats that inspired him to

replicate them." But this information clashes with another social archetype: our culture views modern technology as a European development. So the Afro-Phoenicians' feats do not conform to the textbooks' overall story line about how white Europeans taught the rest of the world how to do things. None of the textbooks credits the Muslims with preserving Greek wisdom, enhancing it with ideas from China, India, and Africa, and then passing on the resulting knowledge to Europe via Spain. Instead, they show Henry inventing navigation and imply that before Europe there was nothing, at least nothing modern.

In fact, Henry's work was based mostly on ideas that were known to the ancient Egyptians and Phoenicians and had been developed further in Arabia, North Africa, and China, Even the word the Portuguese applied to their new ships, caravel, derived from the Egyptian caravos.1 Cultures do not evolve in a vacuum; diffusion of ideas is perhaps the most important cause of cultural development. Contact with other cultures often triggers a cultural flowering. Anthropologists call this phenomenon efflorescence. Children in elementary school learn that Persian and Mediterranean civilizations flowered in antiquity due to their location on trade routes. Here with Henry at the dawn of European world domination, textbooks have a golden opportunity to apply this same idea of cultural diffusion to Europe, They squander it. Not only did Henry have to develop new instruments, according to The American Way, but “people didn't know how to build seagoing ships, either,”“ Students are left without a clue as to how aborigines ever reached Australia, Polynesians reached Madagascar, or Afro Phoenicians reached the Canaries. By ”people" Way means, of course, Europeansa textbook example of Eurocentrism.

These books are expressions of what the anthropologist Stephen Jett calls “the doctrine of the discovery of America by Columbus.”1“ Table 1 provides a chronological list of expeditions that may have reached the Americas before Columbus, with comments on the quality of the evidence for each as of 1994.1[While the list is long, it is still probably incomplete. A map found in Turkey dated 1513 and said to be based on material from the library of Alexander the Great includes coastline details of South America and Antarctica. Ancient Roman coins keep turning up all over the Americas, causing some archaeologists to conclude that Roman seafarers visited the Americas more than once,22 Native

Americans also crossed the Atlantic: anthropologists conjecture that Native Americans voyaged east millennia ago from Canada to Scandinavia or Scotland. Two Indians shipwrecked in Holland around 60 B.C. became major curiosities in Europe."

The evidence for each of these journeys offers fascinating glimpses into the societies and cultures that existed on both sides of the Atlantic and in Asia before 1492, They also reveal controversies among those who study the distant past. If textbooks allowed for controversy, they could show students which claims rest on strong evidence, which on softer ground. As they challenged students to make their own decisions as to what probably happened, they would also be introducing students to the various methods and forms of evidence oral history, written records, cultural similarities, linguistic changes, human blood types, pottery, archaeological dating, plant migrationsthat researchers use to derive knowledge about the distant past. Unfortunately, textbooks seem locked into a rhetoric of certainty. James West Davidson and Mark H. Lytle, coauthors of the textbook The United StatesA History of the Republic, have also written After the Fact, a book for college history majors in which they emphasize that history is not a set of facts but a series of arguments, issues, and controversies,14 Davidson and Lytle's high school textbook, howevet, like its competitors, presents history as answers, not questions.

New evidence that emerges, as archaeologists and historians compare American cultures with cultures in Africa, Europe, and Asia, may confirm or disprove these arrivals. Keeping up with such evidence is a lot of work. To tell about earlier explorers, textbook authors would have to familiarize themselves with sources such as those cited in the three preceding footnotes. It's easier just to retell the old familiar Columbus story.

Seven of the twelve textbooks I studied at least mention the expeditions of the Norse. These daring sailors reached America in a series of voyages across the North Atlantic, establishing communities on the Faeroe Islands, Iceland, and YEAR 70,000? B.C.12.7 B.C.

6000? B.C.0? B.C.

5000? B.C.

10,000? B.C.? B.C.

9000? B.C. to present 1000 B.C.

1000 B.C. A.D,

BOOB.C.

600 A.D.

1000-1 1311?-1460?

c. 1 1375?-1491 1481-91 1 FROM SiUeria TO Alaska QUALITY OF EVIDENCE High: the survivors peopled the Americas.

Moderate: similarities in blowguns, pa per making, etc.

Moderate: similar pottery, fishing styles.

High: Navajos and Crees resemble each other culturally, differ horn other Indians.

High: continuing contact Oy Inults across Bering Sea.

Low. Chinese legend; cultural sim ilarities.

Moderate: Negroid and Caucasoid likenesses in sculpture and ceramics, Arab history, etc.

Low. megaliths, possible similarities in script and language.

Low: legends of St. Brendan, written C. 850 A.D., confirmed by Norse sagas.

High: oral sagas, conf rmed by archaeology on Newfoundland.

Moderate: Portuguese sources in West Africa, Columbus on Haiti. Balboa in Panama.

Low: inference from Portuguese sources and actions.

Low: cryptic historical sources. Low: cryptic historical sources. High: historical sources.

Table 1. Explorers of America Indonesia (or other direction)

Japan Siberia Siberia China Afro-Phoenicia Phoenicia, Celtic Britain Ireland, via Iceland Greenland, Icelard West Africa Portugal Basque Spain Bristol, England Spain Ecuador Canada. New Mexico Alaska Central America Central America New England, perhaps elsewhere Newfoundland? W eal Indies?

Labrador, Baffin Land, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, possibly Cape Coo and further south Haiti, Panama, possibly Brazil Newfoundland? Brazil?

Newfoundland coast Newfoundland coast Caribbean, including Haiti South America Greenland. The Norse colony on Greenland lasted five hundred years (982-c. 1500), as long as the European settlement of the Americas until now. From Greenland a series of expeditions, some planned, some accidental, reached various parts of North America, including Baffin Land, Labrador, Newfoundland, and possibly New England.

Textbooks that mention the Viking expeditions minimize them. Land of Promise writes, “They merely touched the shore briefly, and sailed away.” Perhaps the authors of Promise did not know that, around 1005, Thorfinn and Gudrid Karlsefni led a party of 65 or 165 or 265 homesteaders (the old Norse sagas vary), with livestock and supplies, to settle Vineland. They lasted two years; Gudrid gave birth to a son. Then conflict with Native Americans caused them to give up. This trip was no isolated incident: Norse were still exporting wood from Labrador to Greenland 350 years later. Some archaeologists and historians believe that the Norse got as far down the coast as North Carolina. The Norse discoveries remained known in western Europe for centuries and were never forgotten in Scandinavia. Columbus surely learned of Greenland and probably also of North America if he visited Iceland in 1477 as he claimed to have done.

It may be fair to say that the Vikings' voyages had little lasting effect on the fate of the world. Should textbooks therefore leave them out? Is impact on the present the sole reason for including an event or fact? It cannot be, of course, or our history books would shrink to twenty-page pamphlets. We include the Norse voyages, not for their ostensible geopolitical significance, but because including them gives a more complete picture of the past. Moreover, if textbooks would only intelligently compare the Norse voyages to Columbus's second voyage, they would help students understand the changes that took place in Europe between 1000 and 1493. As we shall see, Columbus's second voyage was ten times larger than the Norse attempts at settlement. The new European ability to mobilize was in part responsible for Columbus's voyages taking on their awesome significance.

Although seafarers from Africa and Asia may also have made it to the Americas, they never make it into history textbooks. The best known are the voyages of the Afro-Phoenicians, probably launched from Morocco but ultimately from Egypt, that are said to have reached the Atlantic coast of Mexico in about 750 B.C. Organic material associated with colossal heads of basalt that stand along the eastern coast of Mexico stand has been dated to around 750 B.C. The stone heads are realistic portraits of West Africans, according to the anthropologist Ivan Van Sertima, who has done much to bring these images into popular consciousness. Around the same time Indians elsewhere in Mexico created small ceramic

and stone sculptures of what seem to be Caticasoid and Negroid faces. As Alexander von Wuthenau, who collected many such terracotta statues, put it, “It is contradictory to elementary logic and to all artistic experience that an Indian could depict in a masterly way the head of a Negro or of a white person without missing a single racial characteristic, unless he had seen such a person.”27 Although some scholars have dismissed the Caucasoid images as “stylized” Indian heads and the Negroid faces as representing jaguars or human babies, the faces nonetheless stare back at us, steadfastly Caucasoid or Negroid, hard to explain away. Ivan von Sertima and others have adduced additional bits of evidence, including similarities in looms and other cultural elements, identical strains of cotton that probably required human intervention to cross the Atlantic, and information in Arab historical sources about extensive ocean navigation by Africans and Phoenicians in the eighth century B.C.

What is the importance today of these African and Phoenician predecessors of Columbus? Like the Vikings, they provide a fascinating story, one that can hold high school students on the edge oftheir seats. We might also realize another kind of importance by contemplating the particular meaning of Columbus Day. Italian Americans infer something positive about their “national character” from the exploits of their ethnic ancestors. The American sociologist George Homans once quipped, explaining why he had written on his own ancestors in East Anglia, rather than on some larger group elsewhere; “They may be humans, but not Homans!” Similarly, Scandinavians and Scandinavian Americans have always believed the Norse sagas about the Vikings, even when most historians did not, and finally confirmed them by conducting archaeological research in Newfoundland.

If Columbus is especially relevant to western Europeans and the Vikings to Scandinavians, what is the meaning to African Americans of the preColumbian voyagers from Africa? After visiting the Von Wuthenau museum in Mexico City, the Afro-Carib scholar Tiho Narva wrote, “With his unique collection surrounding me, I had an eerie feeling that veils obscuring the past had been torn asunder. . . . Somehow, upon leaving the museum I suddenly felt that I could walk taller for the rest of my days.”19 Von Sertima's book is in its sixteenth printing and he is lionized by black undergraduates across America. Rap music groups chant “but we already had been there” in verses about Columbus.0

Obviously, African Americans want to see positive images of "themselves" in American history. So do we all.

As with the Norse, including the Afro-Phoenicians gives a more complete and complex picture of the past, showing that navigation and exploration did Rock heads nine feet tall face the ocean in southeastern Mexico. Archaeologists call them Olmec heads after their name for the Indians who carved them. According to an archaeologist who helped uncover them, the faces are "amazingly Negroid." Today some archaeologists believe that the mouth lines resemble jaguar-like expressions Mayan children still make. Others think the statues are of "fat babies" or Indian kings or resemble sculptures in Southeast Asia.

not begin with Europe in the 1400s. Like the Norse, the Afro-Phoenicians illustrate human possibility, in this case black possibility, or, more accurately, the prowess of a multiracial society. Unlike the Norse, the Africans and Phoenicians seem to have made a permanent impact on the Americas. The huge stone statues in Mexico imply as much. It took enormous effort to quarry these basalt blocks, each weighing ten to forty tons, move them from quarries seventy-five miles away, and sculpt them into heads six to ten feet tall. Wherever they were from, the human models for these heads were important people, people to be worshiped or obeyed or at least remembered." However, archaeologists have not agreed that they were Afro-Phoenicians, so including the story opens a window through which students can view an ongoing controversy.

Of the twelve textbooks I surveyed, only two even mention the possibility of African or Phoenician exploration. The American Adventure simply poses two questions: "What similarities are there between the great monuments of the Maya and those of ancient Egypt?" and "Might windblown sailors from Asia, Europe, Africa, or the South Pacific have mingled with the earlier inhabitants of the New World?" The textbook supplies no relevant information and even claims, "You should be able to deal with these questions without doing research." Nonsense. Most classrooms will simply ignore the questions.32 The United StatesA History ofthe Republic mentions pre-Columbian expeditions only to assure us that we need not concern ourselves with them: "None of these Europeans, Africans, or Asians left lasting traces of their presence in the Americas, nor did they develop any lasting relationships with the first Americans." Unsatisfactory

as these fragments are, they are the entire treatment of the issue in all twelve textbooks.

American history textbooks promote the belief that most important developments in world history are traceable to Europe. To grant too much human potential to pre-Columbian Africans might jar European American sensibilities. As Samuel Marble put it, “The possibility of African discovery of America has never been a tempting one for American historians.” Teachers and curricula that present African history and African Americans in a positive light are often condemned for being Afrocentric. White historians insist that the case for the AfroPhoenicians has not been proven; we must not distort history to improve black children's self-image, they say. They are right that the case hasn't been proven, but textbooks should include the Afro-Phoenicians as a possibility, a controversy.

Standard history textbooks and courses discriminate against students who have been educated by rap songs or by von Sertima. Imagine an eleventhgrade classroom in American history in early fall. The text is Life and Liberty; students are reading Chapter Two, “Exploration and Colonization,” What happens when an African American girl shoots up her hand to challenge the statement “Not until 1497-1499 did the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama sail around Africa”? From rap songs the girl has learned that Afro-Phoenicians beat Da Gama by more than 2,000 years. Does the teacher take time to research the question and find that the student is right, the textbook wrong? More likely, s/he puts down the student's knowledge: “Rap songs aren't appropriate in a history class!” Or s/he humors the child: “Yes, but that was long ago and didn't lead to anything. Vasco da Gama's discovery is the important one.” These responses allow the class to move “forward” to the next topic. They also contain some truth: the Afro-Phoenician circumnavigation didn't lead to any new trade routes or national alliances, because the Afro-Phoenicians were already trading with India through the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. Textbooks don't name Vasco da Gama because something came from his “discovery,” however. They name him because he was white. Two pages later, Life and Liberty tells us that Hernando De Soto “discovered [the] Mississippi River.” (Of course, it had been discovered and named Mississippi by ancestors of the Indians who were soon to chase De Soto down it.) Textbooks portray De Soto in armor, not showing

that by the time he reached the river, his men and women had lost almost all their clothing in a fire set by Indians in Alabama and were wearing replacements woven from reeds. De Soto's “discovery” had no larger significance and led to no trade or white settlement. His was merely the first white face to gaze upon the Mississippi. That's why ten of the twelve American history textbooks include him. From Erik the Red to Peary at the North Pole to the first man on the moon, we celebrate most discoverers because they were first and because they were white, not because of events ihat flowed or did not flow from their accomplishments. My hypothetical teacher subtly changed the ground rules for Da Gama, but they changed right back for De Soto. In this way students learn that black feats are not considered important while white ones are.

Continuing down the list of likely pre-Columbian explorations, we arrive at an interesting vantage point from which to consider this debate. Let us compare two other possible pre-Columbian expeditions, from the west coasts of Africa and Ireland.

When Columbus reached Haiti, he found the Arawaks in possession of some spear points made of “guanine.” The Indians said they got them from black traders who had come from ihe south and east. Guanine proved to be an alloy of gold, silver, and copper, identical to the gold alloy preferred by West Africans, who also called it “guanine.” Islamic historians have recorded stories of voyages west from Mali in West Africa around 1311, during the reign of Mansa Bakari II. From time to time in ihe fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, shipwrecked African vessels-remnants, presumably, of transatlantic tradewashed up on Cape Verde. From contacts in West Africa, the Portuguese heard that African traders were visiting Brazil in the mid-1400s; this knowledge may have influenced Portugal to insist on moving the pope's “line of demarcation” further west in the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494). Traces of diseases common in Africa have been detected in pre-Columbian corpses in Brazil. Columbus's son Ferdinand, who accompanied the admiral on his third voyage, reports that people they met or heard about in eastern Honduras “are almost black in color, ugly in aspect,” probably Africans. The first Europeans to reach Panama-Balboa and company-reported seeing black slaves in an Indian town. The Indians said they had captured them from a nearby black community. Oral history from Afro-Mexicans

contains tales of pre-Columbian crossings from West Africa. In all, then, data from diverse sources suggest that pre-Columbian voyages from West Africa to America were probable.

In contrast, the evidence for an Irish trip to America comes from only one side of the Atlantic. Irish legends written in the ninth or tenth century tell of “an abbot and seventeen monks who journeyed to the 'promised land of the saints' during a seven-year sojourn in a leather boat” centuries earlier. The stories include details that are literally fabulous: each Easter, the priest and his crew supposedly conducted Mass on the back of a whale. They visited a “pillar of crystal” {perhaps an iceberg) and an “island of fire.” We cannot simply dismiss these legends, however. When the Norse first reached Iceland, Irish monks were living on the island, whose volcanoes could have provided the “island of fire.”

How do American history textbooks treat these two sets of legendary voyagers? Five of the textbooks admit the possibility of an Irish expedition. The Challenge ofFreedom gives the fullest account:

Some people believe that . . . Irish missionaries may have sailed to the Americas hundreds of years before the first voyages of Columbus. According to Irish legends, Irish monks sailed the Atlantic Ocean in order to bring Christianity to the people they met. One Irish legend in particular tells about a land southwest of the Azores. This land was sup posedly discovered by St. Brendan, an Irish missionary, about 500 AD.

Not one textbook mentions the West Africans, however. While leaving out Columbus's predecessors, American history books continue to make mistakes when they get to the last “discoverer.” They present cutand-dried answers, mostly glorifying Columbus, always avoiding uncertainty or controversy. Often their errors seem to be copied from other textbooks. Let me repeat the collective Columbus story they tell, this time italicizing everything in it that we have solid reason to believe is true.

Horn in Genoa, of humble parents, Christopher Columbus grew up to become an experienced seafarer, venturing as far O! Iceland and West Africa. His adventures convinced him that the world must be round and that the fabled riches of the East-spices and goldcould be had by sailing west, superseding the overland routes, which the Turks had closed

off to commerce. To get funding for his enterprise, he baeeched monarch after monarch in Western Europe. After at first being dismissed by Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, Columbus finally got his chance when Isabella decided to underwrite a modest expedition. Columbus outfitted three pitifully small ships, the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria, and setforth from Spain. After an arduous journey of more than two months, during which his mutinous crew almost threw him overboard, Columbus discovered the West Indies on October 12, 1492. Unfortunately, although he made three more voyages lo America, he never knew he had discovered a New World. Columbus died in obscurity, unappreciated and penniless. Yet without his daring American history u'ouid have been very different, for in a sense he made it all possible.

As you can see, textbooks get the date right, and the names of the ships. Most of the rest that they tell us is untrustworthy. Many aspects of Columbus's life remain a mystery. He claimed to be from Genoa, Italy, and there is evidence that he was. There is also evidence that he wasn't: Columbus didn't seem to be able to write in Italian, even when writing to people in Genoa. Some historians believe he was Jewish, a converso. or convert to Christianity, probably from Spain, (Spain was pressuring its Jews to convert to Christianity or leave the country.) He may have been a Genoese Jew. Still other historians claim he was from Corsica, Portugal, or elsewhere.

What about Columbus's social class background? One textbook tells us he was poor, “the son of a poor Genoese weaver,” while another assures us he was rich, “the son of a prosperous wool-weaver.” Each is certain, but people who have spent years studying Columbus say we cannot be sure.

We do not even know for certain where Columbus thought he was going. Evidence suggests he was seeking Japan, India, and Indonesia; other evidence indicates he was trying to reach “new” lands to the west. Historians have asserted each viewpoint for centuries. Because “India was known for its great wealth,” Las Casas points out, it was in Columbus's interest “to induce the monarchs, always doubtful about his enterprise, to believe him when he said he was setting out in search of a western route to India.”40 After reviewing the evidence, Columbus's recent biographer Kirkpatrick Sale concluded “we will likely never know for sure.” Sale noted that such a conclusion is “not very

satisfactory for those who demand certainty in their historical tales." Predictably, all our textbooks are of this type: all "know" he was seeking Japan and the East Indies. Thus authors keep their readers from realizing that historians do not know all the answers, hence history is no! just a process of memorizing them.

The extent to which textbooks sometimes disagree, particularly when each seems so certain of what it declares, can be pretty scary. What was the weather like during Columbus's 1492 trip? According to Land ofPromise, his ships were "storm-battered"; but American Adventures says they enjoyed "peaceful seas." How long was the voyage? "After more than two months at sea," according to The Challenge of Freedom, the crews saw land; but The American Adventure says the voyage lasted "nearly a month." What were the Americas like when Columbus arrived? "Thickly peopled," in one book, quoting Columbus; "thinly spread," according to another.

To make a better myth, American culture has perpetuated the idea that Columbus was boldly forging ahead while everyone else, even his own crew, imagined the world was flat. The American Pageant is the only textbook that still Most textbooks include a portrait of Columbus, These head-and-shoulder pictures have no value whatsoever as historical documents, because not one of the countless images we have of the man was painted in his lifetime. To make the point that these images are inau thentic, the Library of Congress sells this T-shirt featuring six different Columbus faces.

repeats this hoax, "The superstitious sailors . . , grew increasingly mutinous," according to Pageant, because they were "fearful of sailing over the edge of the world." In iruth, few people on both sides of the Atlantic believed in 1492 that the world was flat. Most Europeans and Native Americans knew the world to be round. It looks round. It casts a circular shadow on the moon. Sailors see its roundness when ships disappear over the horizon, hull first, then sails,

Washington Irving wins credit for popularizing the flat-earth fable in 1828. In his bestselling biography of Columbus, Irving described Columbus's supposed defense of his round-earth theory before the flat-earth savants at Salamanca University, Irving himself surely knew the story to be fiction,42 He probably thought it added a nice dramatic nourish and would do no harm. But it does. It invites us to believe that the "primitives" of the world, admittedly

including pre-Columbian Europeans, had only a crude understanding of the planet they lived on, until aided by a forward-thinking European. It also turns Columbus into a man of science who corrected our faulty geography. Intense debunking of the flat-earth legend by professional historians has made an impact. Yet even the eleven textbooks that do not repeat Irving's fiction choose wholly ineffectual words to counter it. This passage from Triumph of the American Nation exemplifies the problem: “Convinced that the earth was round, a knowledge shared by many informed people of” the day, Columbus Wifliout project funding, theworldmightstillbe flat American culture perpetuates the image of Columbus boldly forging ahead while everyone else imagined the world was Hat. A character in the movie Slar Trek V, for instance, repeats the Washington Irving lie: 'The people of your world once believed the earth to be flat; Columbus proved it was round." Every October, Madison Avenue makes use of the flat-earth theme. This ad seeks clients for daring and courageous stock brokers!

believed that if he sailed far enough to the west he would reach Asia." To be sure, the minor subordinate clause quietly notes that not everyone, perhaps not even most people, believed in flat-earth geography. But the main subordinate clause and the primary clause emphasize Columbus's own belief that the earth was round. The sentence makes little sense unless the reader infers that Columbus's belief was unusual. I have talked not only with students but also with teachers who have read textbooks like Triumph without noticing this point. Thus teachers often still believe and still relay to their students the flatearth legend.

Even the death of Columbus has been changed to make a better story. Having Columbus come to a tragic end-sick, poor, and ignorant of his great accomplishment-adds melodramatic interest. “Columbus's discoveries were not immediately appreciated by the Spanish government,” according to The American Adventure. “He died in neglect in 1506.” In fact, Spain “immediately appreciated” Columbus's “discoveries,” which is why they immediately outfitted him for a much larger second voyage. In 1499 Columbus made a major gold strike on Haiti, He and his successors then forced hundreds of thousands of Indians to mine the gold for them. Money from the Americas continued to flow in to Columbus in Spain, perhaps not what he felt he deserved, but enough to keep all wolves far from his door. Columbus died well off and

left his heirs well endowed, even with the title, “Admiral of the Ocean Sea,” now carried by his eighteenth-generation descendant. Moreover, Columbus's own journal shows clearly that he knew he had reached a “new” continent.

The errors textbooks make about Columbus do not result simply from sloppy scholarship. Textbooks want to magnify Columbus as a great hero, a “man of vision, energy, resourcefulness, and courage,” in the words of The American Pageant. Some of the details the textbook authors pile on are harmless, I suppose, such as the fabrications about Isabella's sending a messenger galloping after Columbus and pawning her jewels to pay for the expedition,44 All of the enhancements humanize Columbus, however, to induce readers to identify with him. Here is a passage from Land of Promise:

It is October, 1492. Three small, storm-battered ships are lost at sea, sailing into an unknown ocean. A frightened crew has been threatening to throw their stubborn captain overboard, turn the ships around, and make for the safety of familiar shores.

Then a miracle: The sailors see some green branches floating on the water. Land birds fly overhead. From high in the ship's rigging the As Columbus cruised the coast of Venezuela on his third voyage, he passed the Orinoco River, “I have come to believe that this is a mighty continent, which was hitherto unknown,” he wrote,

I am greatly supported in this view by reason of this great river and by this sea which is fresh," Columbus knew that no mere island could sustain such a large flow of water. When he returned home, he added a continent to the islands in his coat of arms. Its presence at the bottom of the lowet left quadrant visually rebuKes the authors of American history textbooks.

lookout cries, “Land, land ahead!” Fears turn to joy. Soon the grateful captain wades ashore and gives thanks to God.

Now, really. The Nifia, Pinca, and Santd Mdrid were not “storm-battered.” To make a better myth, the textbook authors want the voyage to seem harder than it was, so they invent bad weather. Columbus's own journal reveals that the three ships enjoyed lovely sailing. Seas were so calm that for days at a time sailors were able to converse from one ship to another. Indeed, the only time they experienced even moderately high seas was on the last day when they knew they were near land.

To make a better myth, to make the trip seem longer than it was, most of the textbooks overlook Columbus's stopover in the Canary Islands. The voyage across the unknown Atlantic took one month, not two.

To make a better myth, the textbooks describe Columbus's ships as tiny and inefficient, when actually “these three vessels were fully suited to his purpose,” as naval author Pietro Barozzi has pointed out.'

To make a better myth, six of twelve textbooks exaggerate the crew's complaints into a near-mutiny. The primary sources differ. Some claim the sailors threatened to go back home if they didn't reach land soon. Other sources claim that Columbus lost heart and that the captains of the other two ships persuaded him to keep on. Still other sources suggest that the three leaders met and agreed to continue on for a few more days and then reassess the situation. After studying the matter, Columbus's biographer Samuel Eliot Mortson reduced the complaints to mere griping: “They were all getting on each other's nerves, as happens even nowadays,”46 So much for the crew's threat to throw Columbus overboard.

Such exaggeration is not entirely harmless. Another archetype lurks below the surface: that those who direct social enterprises are more intelligent than those nearer the bottom. Bill Bigelow, a high school history teacher, has pointed out that “the sailors are stupid, superstitious, cowardly, and sometimes scheming, Columbus, on the other hand, is brave, wise, and godly.” These portrayals amount to an “anti-working class pro-boss polemic.”47 Indeed, the only textbook that still repeats the old flat-earth myth thinks badly of the sailors, whom it characterizes as “a motley crew.”

False entries in the log of the Santa Maria constitute another piece of the myth, “Columbus was a true leader,” says A History ofthe United Stales. “He altered the records ofdistances they had covered so the crew would not think they had gone too far from home,” Salvador de Madariaga has persuasively argued that to believe this, we would have to think the others on the voyage were fools. Columbus had “no special method, available only to him, whereby distances sailed could be more accurately reckoned than by the other pilots and masters.” Indeed, Columbus was las experienced as a navigator than the Pinion brothers, who captained the Nina and Pinto.41 During the return voyage, Columbus confided in his journal the real reason for the false log entries: he wanted

to keep the route to the Indies secret. As paraphrased by Las Casas, “He says that he pretended to have gone a greater distance in order to confound the pilots and sailors who did the charts, that he might remain master of that route to the Indies.”

To make a better myth, our textbooks find space for many other humanizing particulars. They have the lookout cry “Tierra!” or “Land!” Most of them tell us that Columbus's first act after going ashore was “thanking God for leading them safely across the sea”even though the surviving summary of Columbus's own journal states only that “before them all, he took possession ofthe island, as in fact he did, for the King and Queen, his Sovereigns.”50 Many of the textbooks tell of Columbus's three later voyages to the Americas, but they do not find space to tell us how Columbus treated the lands and the people he “discovered,”

Christopher Columbus introduced two phenomena that revolutionized race relations and transformed the modern world: the taking of land, wealth, and labor from indigenous peoples, leading to their near extermination, and the transatlantic slave trade, which created a racial underclass.

Columbus's initial impression of the Arawaks, who inhabited most of the islands in the Caribbean, was quite favorable. He wrote in his journal on October 13, 1492: “At daybreak great multitudes of men came to the shore, all young and of fine shapes, and very handsome. Their hair was not curly but loose and coarse like horse-hair. All have foreheads much broader than any people I had hitherto seen. Their eyes are large and very beautiful. They are not black, but the color of the inhabitants of the Canaries,” (This reference to the Canaries was ominous, for Spain was then in the process of exterminating the aboriginal people of those islands.) Columbus went on to describe the Arawaks' canoes, “some large enough to contain 40 or 45 men.” Finally, he got down to business: “I was very attentive to them, and strove to learn if they had any gold. Seeing some of them with little bits of metal hanging at their noses, I gathered from them by signs that by going southward or steering round the island in that direction, there would be found a king who possessed great cups full of gold.” At dawn the next day, Columbus sailed to the other side of the island, probably one of the Bahamas, and saw two or three villages. He ended his description of them with these menacing words: “I could conquer the whole of them with fifty men and govern them

as I pleased."1 On his first voyage, Columbus kidnapped some ten to twenty-five Indians and took them back with him to Spain." Only seven or eight of the Indians arrived alive, but along with the parrots, gold trinkets, and other exotica, they caused quite a stir in Seville. Ferdinand and Isabella provided Columbus with seventeen ships, 1,200 to 1,500 men, cannons, crossbows, guns, cavalry, and attack dogs for a second voyage. One way to visualize what happened next is with the help of the famous science fiction story War of the Worlds. H. G. Wells intended his tale of earthlings' encounter with technologically advanced aliens as an allegory. His frightened British commoners (New Jerseyites in Orson Welles's radio adaptation) were analogous to the "primitive" peoples of the Canaries or America, and his terrifying aliens represented the technologically advanced Europeans. As we identify with the helpless earthlings, Wells wanted us also to sympathize with the natives on Haiti in 1493, or on Australia in 1788, or in the upper Amazon jungle in the 1990s.

When Columbus and his men returned to Haiti in 1493, they demanded food, gold, spun cottonwhatever the Indians had that they wanted, including ; sex with their women. To ensure cooperation, Columbus used punishment by example. When an Indian committed even a minor offense, the Spanish cut off his ears or nose. Disfigured, the person was sent back to his village as living evidence of the brutality the Spaniards were capable of.

After a while, the Indians had had enough. At first their resistance was mostly passive. They refused to plant food for the Spanish to take. They abandoned towns near the Spanish settlements. Finally, the Arawaks fought back. Their sticks and stones were no more effective against the armed and clothed Spanish, however, than the earthlings' rifles against the aliens' death rays in War ofthe Worlds.

The attempts at resistance gave Columbus an excuse to make war. On March 24, 1495, he set out to conquer the Arawaks. Bartolome de Las Casas described the force Columbus assembled to put down the rebellion. "Since the Admiral perceived that daily the people of the land were taking up arms, ridiculous weapons in reality . . . he hastened to proceed to the country and disperse and subdue, by force of arms, the people of the entire island ... For this he chose 200 foot soldiers and 20 cavalry, with many crossbows and small cannon, lances, and swords, and a still more terrible weapon against the Indians, in addition to the horses: this

was 20 hunting dogs, who were turned loose and immediately tore the Indians apart.'"54 Naturally, the Spanish won. According to Kirkpatrick Sale, who quotes Ferdinand Columbus's biography of his father "The soldiers mowed down dozens with point-blank volleys, loosed the dogs to rip open limbs and bellies, chased fleeing Indians into the bush to skewer them on sword and pike, and 'with God's aid soon gained a complete victory, killing many Indians and capturing others who were also killed.'"

Having as yet found no fields of gold, Columbus had to return some kind of dividend to Spain. In 1495 the Spanish on Haiti initiated a great slave raid. They rounded up 1,500 Arawaks, then selected the 500 best specimens (of whom 200 would die en route to Spain). Another 500 were chosen as slaves for the Spaniards staying on the island. The rest were released. A Spanish eyewitness described the event: "Among them were many women who had infants at the breast. They, in order the better to escape us, since they were afraid we would turn to catch them again, left their infants anywhere on the ground and started to flee like desperate people; and some fled so far that they were removed from our settlement of Isabela seven or eight days beyond mountains and across huge rivers; wherefore from now on scarcely any will be had."" Columbus was excited. "In the name of the Holy Trinity, we can send from here all the slaves and brazil-wood which could be sold," he wrote to Ferdinand and Isabella in 1496. "In Castile, Portugal, Aragon, . . . and the Canary Islands they need many slaves, and I do not think they get enough from Guinea." He viewed the Indian death rate optimistically: 'Although they die now, they will not always die. The Negroes and Canary Islanders died at first."

In the words of Hans Koning, "There now began a reign of terror in Hispaniola." Spaniards hunted Indians for sport and murdered them for dog food. Columbus, upset because he could not locate the gold he was certain was on the island, set up a tribute system. Ferdinand Columbus described how it worked: "(The Indians) all promised to pay tribute to the Catholic Sovereigns every three months, as follows: In the Cibao, where the gold mines were, every person of 14 years of age or upward was to pay a large hawk's bell of gold dust; all others were each to pay 25 pounds of cotton. Whenever an Indian delivered his tribute, he was to receive a brass or copper token which he must wear about his neck as proofthat he had made his payment. Any Indian found without such a

token was to be punished.”" With a fresh token, an Indian was safe for three months, much of which time would be devoted to collecting more gold. Columbus's son neglected to mention how the Spanish punished those whose tokens had expired: they cut off their hands.

All of these gruesome facts are available in primary source material-letters by Columbus and by other members of his expeditionsand in the work of Las Casas, the first great historian of the Americas, who relied on primary materials and helped preserve them. I have quoted a few primary sources in this chapter. Most textbooks make no use of primary sources. A few incorporate brief extracts that have been carefully selected or edited to reveal nothing unseemly about the Great Navigator.

The tribute system eventually broke down because what it demanded was impossible. To replace it, Columbus installed the tncomenda system, in which he granted or “commended” entire Indian villages to individual colonists or groups of colonists. Since it was not called slavery, this forced-labor system escaped the moral censure that slavery received. Following Columbus's example, Spain made the encomienda system official policy on Haiti in 1502; other conquistadors subsequently introduced it to Mexico, Peru, and Florida.

The tribute and encomienda systems caused incredible depopulation. On Haiti the colonists made the Indians mine gold for them, raise Spanish food, and even carry them everywhere they went. The Indians couldn't stand it. Pedro de Cordoba wrote in a letter to King Ferdinand in 1517, “As a result of the sufferings and hard labor they endured, the Indians choose and have chosen suicide. Occasionally a hundred have committed mass suicide. Trie women, exhausted by labor, have shunned conception and childbirth . . . Many, when pregnant, have taken something to abort and have aborted. Others after delivery have killed their children with their own hands, so as not to leave them in such oppressive slavery.”

American History reproduces “Columbus Landing in the Bahamas,” the first of eight huge “historical” paintings in tbe rotunda of the U.S. Capitol (above). The 1847 painting by John vanderlyn illustrates the heroic treatment of Columbus in most textbooks. An alternative representation of Columbus's enterprise might be Theodore de Bry's woodcut, created around 1504 (opposite). De Bry based this engraving on accounts of Indians who impaled themselves, drank

poison, jumped off cliffs, hanged themselves, and killed their children. The artist squeezed all of these fatal deeds into one picture! De Bry's images became important historical documents in their own right. Accompanied by Las Casas's writings, they circulated throughout sixteenthcentury Europe and gave rise to the “Black Legend” of Spanish cruelty, which other European countries used to denounce Spain's colonialism, mostly out of envy. No textbook includes any visual representation of the activities of Columbus and his men that is other than glorious.

Beyond acts of individual cruelty, the Spanish disrupted the Indian ecosystem and culture. Forcing Indians to work in mines rather than in their gardens led to widespread malnutrition. The intrusion of rabbits and livestock caused further ecological disaster. Diseases new to the Indians played a role, although smallpox, usually the big killer, did not appear on the island until after 1516. Some ofthe Indians tried fleeing to Cuba, but the Spanish soon followed them there. Estimates of Haiti's pre-Columbian population range as high as 8,000,000 people. When Christopher Columbus returned to Spain, he left his brother Bartholomew in charge of the island. Bartholomew took a census of Indian adults in 1496 and came up with 1,100,000. The Spanish did not count children under fourteen and could not count Arawaks who had escaped into the mountains. Kirkpatrick Sale estimates that a more accurate total would probably be in the neighborhood of 3,000,000. “By 1516,” according to Benjamin Keen, “thanks to the sinister Indian slave trade and labor policies initiated by Columbus, only some 12,000 remained.” Las Casas tells us that fewer than 200 Indians were alive in 1542, By 1555, they were all gone.

Thus nasty details like cutting off hands have somewhat greater historical importance than nice touches like “Tierra!” Haiti under the Spanish is one of the primary instances of genocide in all human history. Yet only one of the twelve textbooks. The American Pageant, mentions the extermination. None mentions Columbus's role in it.

Columbus not only sent the first slaves across the Atlantic, he probably sent more slavesabout five thousandthan any other individual. To her credit, Queen Isabella opposed outright enslavement and returned some Indians to the Caribbean. But other nations rushed to emulate Columbus. In 1501 the Portuguese began to depopulate Labrador, transporting the now extinct Beothuk Indians to Europe and

Cape Verde as slaves. After the British estab lished beachheads on the Atlantic coast of North America, they encouraged coastal Indian tribes to capture and sell members of mote distant tribes. Charleston, South Carolina, became a major port for exporting Indian slaves. The Pilgrims and Puritans sold the survivors of the Pequoi War into slavery in Bermuda in 1637. The French shipped virtually the entire Natchez nation in chains to the West Indies in 1731.

A particularly repellent aspect of the slave trade was sexual. As soon as the 1493 expedition got to the Caribbean, before it even reached Haiti, Columbus was rewarding his lieutenants with native women to rape.64 On Haiti, sex slaves were one more perquisite that the Spaniards enjoyed. Columbus wrote a friend in 1500, “A hundred castellanoes are as easily obtained for a woman as for a farm, and it is very general and there are plenty of dealers who go about looking for girls; those from nine to ten are now in demand.” The slave trade destroyed whole Indian nations. Enslaved Indians died. To replace the dying Haitians, the Spanish imported tens of thousands more Indians from the Bahamas, which “are now deserted,” in the words of the Spanish historian Peter Martyr, reporting in 1516.M Packed in below deck, with hatchways closed to prevent their escape, so many slaves died on the trip that “a ship without a compass, chart, or guide, but only following the trail of dead Indians who had been thrown from the ships could find its way from the Bahamas to Hispaniola.”67 Puerto Rico and Cuba were next.

Because the Indians died, Indian slavery then led to the massive slave trade the other way across the Atlantic, from Africa. This trade also began on Haiti, initiated by Columbus's son in 1505. Predictably, Haiti then became the site of the first large-scale slave revolt, when blacks and Indians banded together in 1519. The uprising lasted more than a decade and was finally brought to an end by the Spanish in the 1530s.6S Of the twelve textbooks, only six mention that the Spanish enslaved or exploited the Indians anywhere in the Americas. Of these only four verge on mentioning that Columbus was involved. The Untied StatesA History of the Republic places the following passage about the fate of the Indians under the heading “The Fate of Columbus”: “Some Spaniards who had come to the Americas had begun to enslave and kill the original Americans. Authorities in Spain held Columbus responsible for the atrocities.” Note that A History takes pains to isolate

Columbus from the enslavement chargeothers were misbehaving. Life and Liberty implies that Columbus might have participated: “Slavery began in the New World almost as soon as Columbus got off the boat.” Only The American Adventure clearly associates Columbus with slavery. American History levels a vague charge: “Columbus was a great sailor and a brave and determined man. But he was not good at politics or business.” That's it. The other books simply adore him.

As Kirkpatrick Sale poetically sums up, Columbus's “second voyage marks the first extended encounter of European and Indian societies, the clash of cultures that was to echo down through five centuries.”69 The seeds of that fivecentury battle were sown in Haiti between 1493 and 1500. These are not mere details that our textbooks omit. They are facts crucial to understanding American and European history. Capt. John Smith, for example, used Columbus as a role model in proposing a get-tough policy for the Virginia Indians in 1624: “The manner how to suppress them is so often related and approved, I omit it here: And you have twenty examples of the Spaniards how they got the West Indies, and forced the treacherous and rebellious infidels to do all manner of drudgery work and slavery for them, themselves living like soldiers upon the fruits of their labors.”70 The methods unleashed by Columbus are, in fact, the larger part of his legacy. After all, they worked. The island was so well pacified that Spanish convicts, given a second chance on Haiti, could “go anywhere, take any woman or girl, take anything, and have the Indians carry him on their backs as if they were mules.”71 In 1499, when Columbus finally found gold on Haiti in significant amounts, Spain became the envy of Europe. After 1500 Portugal, France, Holland, and Britain joined in conquering the Americas. These nations were at least as brutal as Spain. The British, for example, unlike the Spanish, did not colonize by making use of Indian labor but simply forced the Indians out of the way. Many Indians fled British colonies to Spanish territories (Florida, Mexico) in search of more humane treatment.

Columbus's voyages caused almost as much change in Europe as in the Americas. This is the other half of the vast process historians now call the Columbian exchange. Crops, animals, ideas, and diseases began to cross the oceans regularly. Perhaps the most far-reaching impact of

Columbus's findings was on European Christianity. In 1492 all of Europe was in the grip of the Catholic Church. As L-trousu puts it, before America, “Europe was virtually incapable of self-criticism.”“ After America, Europe's religious uniformity was ruptured. For how were these new peoples to be explained? They were not mentioned in the Bible. The Indians simply did not fit within orthodox Christianity's explanation of the moral universe. Moreover, unlike the Muslims, who might be written off as ”damned infidels," Indians had not rejected Christianity, they had just never encountered it. Were they doomed to hell? Even the animals of America posed a religious challenge. According to the Bible, at the dawn of creation all animals lived in the Garden of Eden. Later, two of each species entered Noah's ark and ended up on Mt. Ararat. Since Eden and Mt. Ararat were both in the Middle East, where could these new American species have come from? Such questions shook orthodox Catholicism and contributed to the Protestant Reformation, which began in 1517.

Politically, nations like the Arawakswithout monarchs, without much hierarchystunned Europeans. In 1516 Thomas More's Utopia, based on an account of the Incan empire in Peru, challenged European social organization by suggesting a radically different and superior alternative. Other social philosophers seized upon the Indians as living examples of Europe's primordial past, which is what John Locke meant hy the phrase “In the beginning, all the world was America.” Depending upon their political persuasion, some Europeans glorified Indian nations as examples of simpler, better societies, from which European civilization had devolved, while others maligned the Indian societies as primitive and underdeveloped. In either case, from Montaigne, Montesquieu, and Rousseau down to Marx and Engels, European philosophers' concepts of the good society were transformed by ideas from America.

America fascinated the masses as well as the elite. In The Tempest, Shakespeare noted this universal curiosity: “They wi!l not give a doit to relieve a lambe beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian.”76 Europe's fascination with the Americas was directly responsible, in fact, for a rise in European self-consciousness. From the beginning America was perceived as an “opposite” to Europe in ways that even Africa never had been. In a sense, there was no “Europe” before 1492. People were simply Tuscan, French, and the

like. Now Europeans began to see similarities among themselves, at least as contrasted with Native Americans. For that matter, there were no “white” people in Europe before 1492. With the transatlantic slave trade, first Indian, then African, Europeans increasingly saw “white” as a race and race as an important human characteristic.

Columbus's own writings reflect this increasing racism. When Columbus was selling Queen Isabella on the wonders of the Americas, the Indians were “well built” and “of quick intelligence.” “They have very good customs,” he wrote, “and the king maintains a very marvelous state, of a style so orderly that it is a pleasure to see it, and they have good memories and they wish to see everything and ask what it is and for what it is used.” Later, when Columbus was justifying his wars and his enslavement of the Indians, they became “cruel” and “stupid,” “a people warlike and numerous, whose customs and religion are very different from ours.”

It is always useful to think badly about people one has exploited or plans to exploit. Modifying one's opinions to bring them into line with one's actions or planned actions is the most common outcome of the process known as “cognitive dissonance,” according to the social psychologist Leon Festinger. No one likes to think of himself or herself as a bad person. To treat badly another person whom we consider a reasonable human being creates a tension between act and attitude that demands resolution. We cannot erase what we have done, and to alter our future behavior may not be in our interest. To change our atti tude is easier, Columbus gives us the first recorded example of cognitive dissonance in the Americas, for although the Indians may have changed from hospirable to angry, they could hardly have evolved from intelligent to stupid so quickly. The change had to be in Columbus.

The Americas affected more than the mind. African and Eurasian stomachs were also affected. Almost half of all major crops now grown throughout the world originally came from the Americas. According to Alfred Crosby, adding corn to African diets caused the population to grow, which helped fuel the African slave trade to the Americas. Adding potatoes to European diets caused the population to explode in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which in turn helped fuel the European emigration to the Americas and Australia. Crops from America also played a key role in the ascendancy of Britain, Germany, and, finally, Russia; the rise

of these northern nations shifted the power base of Europe away from the Mediterranean.

Shortly after ships from Columbus's second voyage returned to Europe, syphilis began to plague Spain and Italy. There is likely a causal connection. On the other hand, more than two hundred drugs derive from plants whose pharmacological uses were discovered by American Indians.

Economically, exploiting the Americas transformed Europe, enriching first Spain, then, through trade and piracy, other nations. Columbus's gold finds on Haiti were soon dwarfed by discoveries of gold and silver in Mexico and the Andes, European religious and political leaders quickly amassed so much gold that they applied gold leaf to the ceilings of their churches and palaces, erected golden statues in the corners, and strung vines of golden grapes between them. Marx and Engels held that this wealth “gave to commerce, to navigation, to industry an impulse never before known.” Some writers credit it with the rise of capitalism and eventually the industrial revolution. Capitalism was probably already underway, but at the least, American riches played a major role in the transforma tion. Gold and silver from America replaced land as the basis for wealth and status, increasing the power of the new merchant class that would soon dominate the world. Where Muslim nations had once rivaled Europe, the new wealth undermined Islamic power. American gold and silver fueled a 400 percent inflation that eroded the economies of most non-European countries and helped Europe to develop a global market system, Africa suffered: the trans-Saharan trade collapsed, because the Americas supplied more gold and silver than the Gold Coast ever could. African traders now had only one commodity that Europe wanted: slaves. In anthropologist Jack Weatherford's words, “Africans thus became victims ofthe discovery ofAmerica as surely as did the American Indians.”

Astoimdingly, not one textbook I surveyed describes these geopolitical implications of Columbia's encounter with the Americas. Three of the twelve books credit Indians with having developed important crops. Otherwise, the west-to-east flow of ideas and wealth goes unnoticed. Eurocentrism blinds textbook authors to contributions to Europe, whether from Arab astronomers, African navigators, or American Indian social structure. By accepting this limited viewpoint, our history textbooks never invite us to think about what happened to reduce mainland Indian societies, whose wealth

and cities awed the Spanish, to the impoverished peasantry they are today. They also rob us of the chance to appreciate how important America has been in the formation of the modern world.

This theft impoverishes us, keeps us ignorant of what has caused the world to develop as it has. Clearly our textbooks are not about teaching history. Their enterprise is Building Character, They therefore treat Columbus as an origin myth: He was good and so are we.8i In 1989 President Bush invoked Columbus as a role model for the nation: "Christopher Columbus not only opened the door to a New World, but also set an example for us all by showing what monumental feats can be accomplished through perseverance and faith."84 The columnist Jeffrey Hart recently went even further: "To denigrate Columbus is to denigrate what is worthy in human history and in us all."85 Textbook authors who are pushing Columbus to build character obviously have no interest in mentioning what he did with the Americas once he reached them even though that's half of the story, and perhaps the more important half.

I am not proposing the breast-beating alternative: that Columbus was bad and so are we. On the contrary, textbooks should show that neither morality nor immorality can simply be conferred upon us by history. Merely being part of the United States, without regard to our own acts and ideas, does not make us moral or immoral beings. History is more complicated than that.

Again we must pause to consider: who are "we"? Columbus is not a hero in Mexico, even though Mexico is much more Spanish in culture than the United States and might be expected to take pride in this hero of Spanish history. Why not? Because Mexico is also much more Indian than the United States, and Mexicans perceive Columbus as white and European. "No sensible Indian person," wrote George P. Horse Capture, "can celebrate the arrival of Columbus."" Cherishing Columbus is a characteristic of white history, not American history,

Columbus's conquest of Haiti can be seen as an amazing feat of courage and imagination by the first of many brave empire builders. It can also be understood as a bloody atrocity that left a legacy of genocide and slavery that endures in some degree to this day. Both views of Columbus are valid; indeed, Columbus's importance in history owes precisely to his being both a heroic navigator and a great

plunderer. If Columbus were only the former, he would merely rival Leif Erikson. Columbus's actions exemplify both meanings of the word exploita remarkable deed and also a taking advantage of. The worshipful biographical vignettes of Columbus in our textbooks serve to indoctrinate students into a mindless endorsement of colonialism that is strikingly inappropriate in today's postcolonia) era. In the words of the historian Michael Wallace, the Columbus myth “allows us to accept the contemporary division of the world into developed and underdeveloped spheres as natural and given, rather than a historical product issuing from a process that began with Columbus's first voyage,”

We understand Columbus and all European explorers and settlers more clearly if we treat 1492 as a meeting of three cultures (Africa was soon involved), rathet than a discovery by one. The term New World is itself part of the problem, for people had lived in the Americas for thousands of years. The Americas were new only to Europeans. The word discover is another part of the problem, for how can one person discover what another already knows and owns? Our textbooks are struggling with this issue, trying to move beyond colonialized history and Eurocentric language, “If Columbus had not discovered the New World,” states Land ofPromise, “others soon would have.” Three sentences later, the authors try to take back the word; “As is often pointed out, Columbus did not really 'discover' America. When he arrived on this side of the Atlantic there were perhaps 20 or more million people already here,” Taking back words is ineffectual, however. Promise's whole approach is to portray whites discovering nonwhites tather than a mutual, multicultural encounter. The point isn't idle. Words are importantthey can influence, and in some cases rationalize, policy. In 1823 Chief Justice John Marshall of the United States Supreme Court decreed that Cherokees had certain rights to their land in Georgia by dint of their “occupancy” but that whites had superior rights owing to their “dis covery.” How Indians managed to occupy Georgia without having previously discovered it Marshall neglected to explain.ae The process of exploration has itself typically been multiracial and multicultural. William Erasmus, a Canadian Indian, pointed out, “Explorers you call great men were helpless. They were like lost children, and it was our people who took care of them.”8“ African pilots helped Prince Henry's ship captains learn their way down the coast of Africa.”0 On Christmas Day 1492, Columbus needed

help. The Santa. Maria ran aground off Haiti. Columbus sent for help to the nearest Arawak town, and “all the people of the town” responded, “with very big and many canoes.” “They cleared the decks in a very short rime,” Columbus continued, and the chief “caused all our goods to be placed together near the palace, until some houses that he gave us where all might be put and guarded had been emptied.”91 On his final voyage Columbus shipwrecked on Jamaica, and the Arawaks there kept him and his crew of more than a hundred alive for a whole year until Spaniards from Haiti rescued them.

So it has continued. Native Americans cured Cartier's men of scurvy near Montreal in 1535. They repaired Francis Drake's Golden Hind in California so he could complete his round-the-world voyage in 1579, Lewis and Clark's expedition to the Pacific Northwest was made possible by tribe after tribe of American Indians, with help from two Shoshone guides, Sacagawea and Toby, who served as interpreters. When Admiral Peary discovered the North Pole, the first person there was probably neither the European American Peary nor the African American Matthew Henson, his assistant, but their four Inuit guides, men and women on whom the entire expedition relied. Our histories fail to mention such assistance. They portray proud Western conquerors bestriding the world like the Colossus at Rhodes.

So long as our textbooks hide from us the roles that people of color have played in exploration, from at least 6000 B.C. to the twentieth century, they encourage us to look to Europe and its extensions as the seat of all knowledge and intelligence. So long as our textbooks simply celebrate Columbus, rather than teach both sides of his exploit, they encourage us to identify with white Western exploitation rather than study it.

The passage in the left-hand column of the opposing page is one of the many legends that hang about Columbus like barnacles“myths, all without substance.”" The passage in the right-hand column is part of a contemporaneous account of an Arawak cacique (leadet) who had fled from Haiti to Cuba,

A man riding a mule moved slowly down a dusty road in Spain. He wore an old and shabby cloak over his shoulders. Though his face seemed young, his red hair was already turning white. It was early in the year 1492 and Christopher Columbus was leaving Spain.

Twice the Spanish king and queen had refused his request

for ships. He had wasted five years of his life trying to get their approval. Now he was going to France. Perhaps the French king would give him the ships he needed.

Columbus heard a clattering sound. He turned and looked up the road. A horse and rider came racing toward him. The rider handed him a message, and Columbus turned his mule around. The message was from the Spanish king and queen, ordering him to return. Columbus would get his ships.

Learning that Spaniards were coming, one day [the cacique] gathered all his people together to remind them of the persecutions which the Spanish had inflicted on the people of Hispaniola:

"Do you know why they persecute us?"

They replied: "They do it because they are cruel and bad."

"1 will tell you why they do it," the cacique stated, "and it is this because they have a lord whom they love very much, and I will show him to you."

He held up a small basket made from palms full of gold, and he said, "Here is their lord, whom rhey serve and adore ... To have this lord, they make us suffer, for him they persecute us, for him they have killed our parents, brothers, all our people . . . Let us not hide this lord from the Christians in any place, for even if we should hide it in our intestines, they would get it out of us; therefore let us throw it in this river, under the water, and they will not know where it is." Whereupon they threw the gold into the river.

The reader will have already guessed chat [he passage on the left comes from an American history textbook, in this case American Adventures. Since the incident probably never happened, including it in a textbook is hard to defend. One way to understand its inclusion is by examining what it does in the narrative. The incident is melodramatic. It creates a mild air of suspense, even though we can be sure, of" course, that everything will turn out all right in the end. Surely the passage encourages identification with Columbus's enterprise, makes Columbus the underdogriding a mule, shabby of cloakand places us on his side.

The passage on the right was recorded by Las Casas, who apparently learned it from Arawaks on Cuba. Unlike the mule story, the cacique's story teaches important facts: that the Spanish sought gold, that they killed Indians, that Indians fled and resisted, (Indeed, after futile attempts at armed resistance on Cuba, this cacique fled "into the brambles." Weeks later, when the Spanish captured him, they burned

him alive.) Nonetheless, no history textbook includes the cacique's story. Doing so might enable us to identify with the Indians' side. By avoiding the names and stories of individual Arawaks and omitting their points of view, authors “otherize” the Indians. Readers need not concern themselves with the Indians' ghastly fate, for Indians never appear as recognizable human beings. Textbooks themselves, it seems, practice cognitive dissonance.

Excluding the passage on the right, including the passage on the left, excluding the probably true, including the improbable, amounts to colonialist history This is the Columbus story that has dominated American history books. All around the globe, however, the nations that were “discovered,” conquered, “civilized,” and colonized by European powers are now independent, at least politically. Europeans and European Americans no longer dictate to them as master to native and therefore need to stop thinking of themselves as superior, morally and technologically. A new and more accurate history of Columbus could assist this transformation.

Of course, this new history must not judge Columbus by standards from our own time. In 1493 the world had not decided, for instance, that slavery was wrong. Some Indian nations enslaved other Indians. Africans enslaved other Africans. Europeans enslaved other Europeans. To attack Columbus for doing what everyone else did would be unreasonable.

However, some Spaniards of the timeBartolome de las Casas, for exampleopposed the slavery, land grabbing, and forced labor that Columbus introduced on Haiti. Las Casas began as an adventurer and became a plantation owner. Then he switched sides, freed his Indians, and became a priest who fought desperately for humane treatment of the Indians. When Columbus and other Europeans argued that Indians were inferior, Las Casas pointed out that Indians were sentient human beings, just like anyone else. When other historians tried to overlook or defend the Indian slave trade, begun by Columbus, Las Casas denounced it as “among the most unpardonable offenses ever committed against God and mankind.” He helped prompt Spain to enact laws against Indian slavery.95 Although these laws came too late to help the Arawaks and were often disregarded, they did help some Indians survive. Centuries after his death, Las Casas was still influencing history; Simon Bolivar used Las Casas's writings

to justify the revolutions between 1810 and 1830 that liberated Latin America from Spanish domination.

When history textbooks leave out the Arawaks, they offend Native Americans. When they omit the possibility of African and Phoenician precursors to Columbus, they offend African Americans. When they glamorize explorers such as De Soto just because they were white, out histories offend all people of color. When they leave out Las Casas, they omit an interesting idealist with whom we all might identify. When they glorify Columbus, our textbooks prod us toward identifying with the oppressor. When textbook authors omit the causes and process of European world domination, they offer us a history whose purpose must be to keep us unaware of the important questions. Perhaps worst of all, when textbooks paint simplistic portraits of a pious, heroic Columbus, they provide feel-good history that bores everyone.

Considering that virtually none of the standard fare surrounding Thanksgiving contains an ounce of authenticity, historical accuracy, or cross-cultural perception, why is it so apparently ingrained? Is it necessary to the American psyche to perpetually exploit and debase its victims in order to justify its history?

Michael Dorris European explorers and invaders discovered an inhabited land. Had it been pristine wilderness then, it would possibly be so still, for neither the technology nor the social organization of Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries had the capacity to maintain, of its own resources, outpost colonies thousands of miles from home.

Francis Jennings The Europeans were able to conquer America not Because of their military genius, or their religious motivation, or their ambition, or their greed. They conquered it by waging unpremeditated biological warfare.

Howard Simpson It is painful to advert to these things. But our forefathers, though wise, pious, and sincere, were nevertheless, in respect to Christian charity, under a cloud; and, in history, truth should be held sacred, at whatever cost . . . especially against the narrow and futile patriotism, which, instead of pressing forward in pursuit of truth, takes pride in walking backwards to cover the slightest nakedness of our forefathers.

Col. Thomas Aspinwall

Lies My Teacher Told Me

3. The Truth about the First Thanksgiving

Over the last few years, I have asked hundreds of college students, “When was the country we now know as the United States first settled?” This is a generous way of phrasing the question; surely “we now know as” implies that the original settlement antedated the founding of the United States. I initially believedcertainly I had hopedthat students would suggest 30,000 B.C., or some other pre-Columbian date.

They did not. Their consensus answer was “ 1620.”

Obviously, my students' heads have been filled with America's origin myth, the story of the first Thanksgiving. Textbooks are among the retailers of this primal legend.

Part of the problem is the word settle. “Settlers” were white, a student once pointed out to me. “Indians” didn't settle. Students are not the only people misled by settle. The film that introduces visitors to Plimoth Plantation tells how “they went about the work of civilizing a hostile wilderness.” One recent Thanksgiving weekend I listened as a guide at the Statue of Liberty talked about European immigrants “populating a wild East Coast.” As we shall see, however, if Indians hadn't already settled New England, Europeans would have had a much tougher job of it.

Starting the story of America's settlement with the Pilgrims leaves out not only the Indians but also the Spanish. The very first non-Native settlers in “the country we now know as the United States” were African slaves left in South Carolina in 1526 by Spaniards who abandoned a settlement attempt. In 1565 the Spanish massacred the French Protestants who had settled briefly at St. Augustine, Florida, and established their own fort there. Some later Spanish settlers were our first pilgrims, seeking regions new to them to secure religious liberty; these were Spanish Jews, who settled in New Mexico in the late 1500s.5 Few Americans know that one-third of the United States, from San Francisco to Arkansas to Natchez to Florida, has been Spanish longer than it has been “American,” and that Hispanic Americans lived here before the first ancestor of the Daughters of the

American Revolution ever left England. Moreover, Spanish culture left an indelible mark on the American West. The Spanish introduced horses, cattle, sheep, pigs, and the basic elements of cowboy culture, including its vocabulary: mustang, bronco, rodeo, lariai, and so on.6 Horses that escaped from the Spanish and propagated triggered the rapid flowering of a new culture among the Plains Indians. “How refreshing it would be,” wrote James Axtell, “to find a textbook that began on the West Coast before treating the traditional eastern colonies.”

Beginning the story in 1620 also omits the Dutch, who were living in what is now Albany by 1614. Indeed, 1620 is not even the date of the first permanent British settlement, for in 1607, the London Company sent settlers to Jamestown, Virginia, No matter. The mythic origin of “the country we now know as the United States” is at Plymouth Rock, and the year is 1620. Here is a representative account from The American Tradition-.

After some exploring, the Pilgrims chose the land around Plymouth Harbor for their settlement. Unfortunately, they had arrived in December and were not prepared for the New England winter. However, they were aided by friendly Indians, who gave them food and showed them how to grow corn. When warm weather came, the colonists planted, fished, hunted, and prepared themselves for the next winter. After harvesting their first crop, they and their Indian friends celebrated the first Thanksgiving.

My students also remember that the Pilgrims had been persecuted in England for their religious beliefs, so they had moved to Holland. They sailed on the Mayflower to America and wrote the Mayflower Compact, the forerunner to our Constitution, according to my students. Times were rough, until they met Squanto, who taught them how to put a small fish as fertilizer in each little cornhill, ensuring a bountiful harvest. But when I ask my students about the plague, they just stare back at me. “What plague? The Black Plague?” No, I sigh,

that was three centuries earlier. The Black Plague does provide a useful introduction, however. William Langer has written that the Black (or bubonic) Plague “was undoubtedly the worst disaster that has ever befallen mankind.”9 In the years 1348 through 1350, it killed perhaps 30 percent of the population of Europe. Catastrophic as it was, the disease itself comprised only part of the horror. According to Langer,

“Almost everyone, in that medieval time, interpreted the plague as a punishment by God for human sins,” Thinking the day ofjudgment was imminent, farmers did not plant crops. Many people gave themselves over to alcohol. Civil and economic disruption may have caused as much death as the disease itself. The entire culture of Europe was affected: fear, death, and guilt became prime artistic motifs. Milder plaguestyphus, syphilis, and influenza, as well as buboniccontinued to ravage Eutope until the end of the seventeenth century.

The warmer parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa have historically been the breeding ground for most of mankind's illnesses. Humans evolved in tropical regions; tropical diseases evolved alongside them. People moved to cooler climates only with the aid of cultural inventionsclothing, shelter, and firethat helped maintain warm temperatures around their bodies. Microbes that live outside their human hosts during part of theit life cycle had trouble coping with northern Europe and Asia.11 When humans migrated to the Americas across the newly drained Bering Strait, if the archaeological consensus is correct, the changes in climate and physical circumstance threatened even those hardy parasites that had survived the earlier slow migration northward from Africa. These first immigrants entered the Americas through a frigid decontamination chamber. The first settlers in the Western Hemisphere thus probably arrived in a healthier condition than most people on earth have enjoyed before or since. Many of the diseases that had long shadowed them simply could not survive the journey.

Neither did some animals. People in the Western Hemisphere had no cows, pigs, horses, sheep, goats, or chickens before the arrival of Europeans and Africans after 1492. Many diseasesfrom anthrax to tuberculosis, cholera to streptococcosis, ringworm to various poxesare passed back and forth between humans and livestock. Since early inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere had no livestock, they caught no diseases ftom them.

Europe and Asia were also made unhealthy by a subtler factor: social density. Organisms that cause disease need a constant supply of new hosts for their own survival. This requirement is nowhere clearer than in the case of smallpox, which cannot survive outside a living human body. But in its enthusiasm, the organism often kills its host. Thus the pestilence creates its own predicament: it requires new

victims at regular intervals. The various influenza viruses must likewise move on, for if their victims survive, they enjoy a period of immunity lasting at least a few weeks, and sometimes a lifetime.14 Small-scale societies like the Paiute Indians of Nevada, living in isolated nuclear and extended families, could and did suffer post-Columbian smallpox epidemics, transmitted to them by more urban neighbors, but they could not sustain such an organism over time.15 Even Indians living in villages did not experience sufficient social density. Villagers might encounter three hundred people each day, but these would usually be the same three hundred people. Coming into repeated contact with the same few others does not have the same consequences as meeting new people, either for human culture or for culturing microbes.

Some areas in the Americas did have high social density. Incan roads connected towns from northern Ecuador to Chile. Fifteen hundred to two thousand years ago the population of Cahokia, Illinois, numbered about 40,000. Trade linked the Great Lakes to Florida, the Rockies to what is now New Eng land.1 We are therefore not dealing with isolated bands of “primitive” peoples. Nonetheless, most of the Western Hemisphere lacked the social density found in much of Europe, Africa, and Asia. And nowhere in the Western Hemisphere were there sinkholes of sickness like London or Cairo, with raw sewage running in the streets.

The scarcity of disease in the Americas was also partly attributable to the basic hygiene practiced by the region's inhabitants. Residents of northern Europe and England rarely bathed, believing it unhealthy, and rarely removed all of their clothing at one time, believing it immodest. The Pilgrims smelled bad to the Indians. Squanto “tried, without success, to teach them to bathe,” according to Feenie Ziner, his biographer.'

For all these reasons, the inhabitants of North and South America (like Australian aborigines and the peoples of the far-flung Pacific islands) were “a remarkably healthy race”20 before Columbus. Ironically, their very health proved their undoing, for they had built up no resistance, genetically or through childhood diseases, ro the microbes that Europeans and Africans would bring to them.

In 1617, just before the Pilgrims landed, the process started in southern New England. For decades, British and French fishermen had fished off the Massachusetts coast. After filling their hulls with cod, they would go ashore to lay

in firewood and fresh water and perhaps capture a few Indians to sell into slavery in Europe. It is likely that these fishermen transmitted some illness to the people they met,21 The plague that ensued made the Black Death pale by comparison. Some historians think the disease was the bubonic plague; others suggest that it was viral hepatitis, smallpox, chicken pox, or influenza.

Within three years the plague wiped out between 90 percent and 96 percent of the inhabitants of coastal New England. The Indian societies lay devastated. Only "the twentieth person is scarce left alive," wrote Robert Cushman, a Absent any illustrations of the epidemics in New England, these Aztec drawings depicting smallpox, coupled with the words of William Bradford, convey something of the horror. "A sorer disease cannot befall [the Indians], they fear it more than the plague. For usually they that have this disease have them in abundance, and for want of bedding and linen and other helps they fall into a lamentable condition as they lie on their hard mats, the pox breaking and mattering and running one into another, their skin cleaving by reason thereof to the mats they lie on. When they turn them, a whole side will flay off at once as it were, and they will be all of a gore blood, most fearful to behold. Ana then being very sore, what with cold and other distempers, they die like rotten sheep." (Quoted in Simpson, Invisible Armies, 8.) Textbooks never display such sympathy for the Indians; at best they give only the Tonto characters (here Squanto, later Sacagawea] individuality and agency.

British eyewitness, recording a death rate unknown in all previous human experience.22 Unable to cope with so many corpses, the survivors abandoned their villages and fled, often to a neighboring tribe. Because they carried the infestation with them, Indians died who had never encountered a white person. Howard Simpson describes what the Pilgrims saw: "Villages lay in ruins because there was no one to tend them. The ground was strewn with the skulls and the bones of thousands of Indians who had died and none was left to bury them."

During the next fifteen years, additional epidemics, most of which we know to have been smallpox, struck repeatedly. European Americans also contracted smallpox and the other maladies, to be sure, but they usually recovered, including, in a later century, the "heavily pockmarked George Washington." Native Americans usually died. The impact of

the epidemics on the two cultures was profound. The English Separatists, already seeing their lives as part of a divinely inspired morality play, found it easy to infer that God was on their side. John Winthrop, governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, called the plague “miraculous.” In 1634 he wrote to a friend in England: “But for the natives in these parts, God hath so pursued them, as for 300 miles space the greatest part of them are swept away by the smallpox which still continues among them. So as God hath thereby cleared our title to this place, those who remain in these parts, being in all not 50, have put themselves under our protection . . ,”24 God the Original Real Estate Agent!

Many Indians likewise inferred that their god had abandoned them. Robert Cushman reported that “those that are left, have their courage much abated, and their countenance is dejected, and they seem as a people affrighted,” After a smallpox epidemic the Cherokee “despaired so much that they lost confidence in their gods and the priests destroyed the sacred objects of the tribe.”21 After all, neither Indians nor Pilgrims had access to the germ theory of disease. Indian healers could supply no cure; their medicines and herbs offered no relief Their religion provided no explanation. That of the whites did. Like the Europeans three centuries before them, many Indians surrendered to alcohol, converted to Christianity, or simply killed themselves.

These epidemics probably constituted the most important geopolitical event of the early seventeenth century. Their net result was that the British, for their first fifty years in New England, would face no real Indian challenge. Indeed, the plague helped prompt the legendarily warm reception Plymouth enjoyed from the Wampanoags. Massasoit, the Wampanoag leader, was eager to ally with the Pilgrims because the plague had so weakened his villages that he feared the Narragansetts to the west.“ When a land conflict did develop between new settlers and old at Saugus in 1631, "God ended the controversy by sending the small pox amongst the Indians,” in the words of the Puritan minister Increase Mather. “Whole towns of them were swept away, in some of them not so much as one Soul escaping the Destruction,”28 By the time the Indian populations of New England had replenished themselves to some degree, it was too late to expel the intruders.

Today, as we compare European technology with that of

the “primitive” Indians, we may conclude that European conquest of America was inevitable, but it did not appear so at the time. The historian Karen Kupperman speculates:

The technology and culture of Indians on America's east coast were genuine rivals to those of the English, and the eventual outcome of the rivalry was not at first clear. . . , One can only speculate what the outcome of the rivalry would have been if the impact of European diseases on the American population had not been so devastating. If colonists had not been able to occupy lands already cleared by Indian farmers who had vanished, colonization would have proceeded much more slowly. If Indian culture had not been devastated by the physical and psychological assaults it had suffered, colonization might not have proceeded at all.

After all, Native Americans had driven off Samuel de Champlain when he had tried to settle in Massachusetts in 1606. The following year, Abenakis had helped expel the first Plymouth Company settlement from Maine.30 Alfred Crosby has speculated that the Norse might have succeeded in colonizing New foundland and Labrador if they had not had the bad luck to emigrate from Greenland and Iceland, distant from European disease centers.51 But this is “what if” history. The New England plagues were no “if.” They continued west, racing in advance of the line of culture contact.

Everywhere in America, the first European explorers encountered many more Indians than did their successors. A century and a half after Hernando De Soto traveled the southeastern United States, French explorers there found the population less than a quarter of what it had been when De Soto had passed through, with attendant catastrophic effects on Native culture and social organization.52 Likewise, on their famous 1806 expedition, Lewis and Clark encountered far more Natives in Oregon than lived there a mere twenty years later.

Henry Dobyns has put together a heartbreaking list of ninety-three epidemics among Native Americans between 1520 and 1918. He has recorded forty-one eruptions of smallpox, four of bubonic plague, seventeen of measles and ten of influenza (both often deadly among Native Americans), and twentyfive of tuberculosis, diphtheria, typhus, cholera, and other diseases. Many of these outbreaks reached truly pandemic proportions, beginning in Florida or Mexico and stopping only when they reached the Pacific and

Arctic oceans,34 Disease played the same crucial role in Mexico and Peru as it did in Massachusetts, How did the Spanish manage to conquer what is now Mexico City? “When the Christians were exhausted from war, God saw fit to send the Indians smallpox, and there was a great pestilence in the city.” When the Spanish marched into Tenochtitlan, there were so many bodies that they had to walk on them. Most of the Spaniards were immune to the disease, and that fact itself helped to crush Aztec morale.

The pestilence continues today. Miners and loggers have recently introduced European diseases to the Yanotnamos of northern Brazil and southern Venezuela, killing a fourth of their total population in 1991. Charles Darwin, writing in 1839, put it almost poetically; “Wherever the European had trod, death seems to pursue the aboriginal.”

Europeans were never able to “settle” China, India, Indonesia, Japan, or much of Africa, because too many people already lived there. The crucial role played by the plagues in the Americas can be inferred from two simple population estimates: William McNeill reckons the population of the Americas at one hundred million in 1492, while William Langer suggests that Europe had only about seventy million people when Columbus set forth.37 The Europeans' advantages in military and social technology might have enabled them to dominate the Americas, as they eventually dominated China, India, Indonesia, and Africa, but not to “settle” the hemisphere. For that, the plague was required. Thus, apart from the European (and African) invasion itself, the pestilence is surely the most important event in the history of America.

The first epidemics wreaked havoc, not only with Indian societies, but also with estimates of pre-Columbian Native American population. The result has been continuing controversy among historians and anthropologists. In 1840 George Catlin estimated aboriginal numbers in the United States and Canada at the time of white contact to be perhaps fourteen million. He believed only two million still survived. By 1880, owing to warfare and deculturation as well as illness, Native numbers had dropped to 250,000, a decline of 98 percent.38 In 1921 James Mooney asserted that only one million Native Americans had lived in the Americas in 1492, Mooney's estimate was accepted until the 1960s and 1970s, even though the arguments supporting it, based largely on inference rather than evidence, were not convincing. Colin

McEvedy provided an example ofthe argument:

The high rollers, of course, claim that native numbers had been reduced to these low levels [between one million and two million] by epidemics of smallpox, measles, and other diseases introduced from Europeand indeed they could have been. But there is no record of any continental [European] population being cut back by the sort of percentages needed to get from twenty million to two or one million. Even the Black Death reduced the population of Europe by only a third.

Note that McEvedy has ignored both the data and also the reasoning about illness summarized above, relying on what amounts to common sense to disprove both. Indeed, he contended, “No good can come of affronting common sense.” But pre-Pilgrim American epidemiology is not a field of everyday knowledge in which “common sense” can be allowed to substitute for years of relevant research. By “common sense” what McEvedy really meant was tradition.

“The American Republic,” the authors of The American Pageant tell us on page one, “was from the outset uniquely favored. It started from scratch on a vast and virgin continent, which was so sparsely peopled by Indians that they were able to be eliminated or shouldered aside.” Henry Dobyns and Francis Jennings have pointed out that this archetype of the “virgin continent” and its corollary, the “primitive tribe,” have subtly influenced estimates of Native population: scholars who viewed Native American cultures as primitive reduced their estimates of precontact populations to match the stereotype. The tiny Mooney estimate thus “made sense”resonated with the archetype. Never mind that the land was, in reality, not a virgin wilderness but recently widowed.

The very death races that some historians and geographers now find hard to believe, the Pilgrims knew to be true. For example, William Bradford described how the Dutch, rivals of Plymouth, traveled to an Indian village in Connecticut to trade. “But their enterprise failed, for it pleased God to afflict these Indians with such a deadly sickness, that out of 1,000, over 950 of them died, and many of them lay rotting above ground for want of burial.. ,”41 This is precisely the 95 percent mortality that McEvedy rejected. On the opposite coast, the Native population of California sank from 300,000 in 1769 (by which time it had already been cut in half by various Spanish-borne diseases) to

30,000 a century later, owing mainly to the gold rush, which brought "disease,

starvation, homicide, and a declining birthrate,“42 For a century after Catlin, historians and anthropologists ”overlooked the evidence offered by the Pilgrims and other early chroniclers. Beginning with P. M. Ashburn in 1947, however, research has established more accurate estimates based on careful continentwide compilations of small-scale studies of first contact and on evidence of early plagues. Most current estimates of the precontact population of the United States and Canada range from ten to twenty mill ion.“ How do the twelve textbooks, most of which were published in the 1980s, treat this topic? Their authors might let readers in on the furious debate of the 1960s and early 1970s, telling how and why estimates changed. Instead, the textbooks simply state numbersvery different numbers! ”As many as ten million,“ American Adventures proposes. ”There were only about 1,000,000 North American Indians,“ opines The American Tradition, ”Scattered across the North American continent were about 500 different groups, many of them nomadic.“ Like other Americans who have not studied the literature, the authors of history textbooks are Still under the thrall of the ”virgin land" and “primitive tribe” archetypes; their most common Indian population estimate is the discredited figure of one million, which five textbooks supply. Only two of the textbooks provide estimates often to twelve million, in the range supported by contemporary scholarship. Two of the textbooks hedge their bets by suggesting one to twelve million, which might reasonably prompt classroom discussion of why estimates are so vague. Three of the textbooks omit the subject altogether. The problem is not so much the estimates as the attitude. Only one book,

The American Adventure, acknowledges that there is a controversy, and this only in a footnote. The other textbooks seem bent on presenting “facts” for children to “learn.” Such an approach keeps students ignorant of the reasoning, arguments, and weighing of evidence that go into social science. About the plagues the textbooks tell even less. Only three of the twelve textbooks even mention Indian disease as a factor at Plymouth or anywhere in New England.04 Life and Liberty does quite a good job. The American Way is the only book that draws the appropriate geopolitical inference about the Plymouth outbreak, but it doesn't discuss any of

the other plagues that beset Indians throughout the hemisphere. According to Triumph of the American Nation: “If the Pilgrims had arrived at Plymouth a few years earlier, they would have found a busy Indian village surrounded by farmland. As it was, an epidemic had wiped out most of the Indians. Those who survived had abandoned the village,“ ”Fortunately for the Pilgrims,“ Triumph goes on, ”the cleared fields remained, and a brook of fresh water flowed into the harbor.“ These four sentences exemplify what Michael W. Apple and Linda K. Christian-Smith call dominance through mentioning.45 The passage can hardly offend Pilgrim descendants, yet it gives the publisher deniabilityTriumph cannot be accused of omitting the plague. But the sentences bury the plague within a description of the beautiful harbor at Plymouth. Therefore, even though gory details of disease and death are exactly the kinds of things that high school students remember best, the plague won't ”stick.” I know, because I never remembered the plague, and my college textbook mentioned itin a fourteen-word passage nestled within a paragraph about the Pilgrims' beliefin God.

In colonial times, everyone knew about the plague. Even before the Mayftowtr sailed, King James of England gave thanks to “Almighty God in his great goodness and bounty towards us” for sending “this wonderful plague among the salvages [j/c].”47 Two hundred years later the oldest American history in my collection]. W. Barber's Interesting Events in the History ofthe United States, published in 1829still recalled the plague.

A few years before the arrival of the Plymouth settlers, a very mortal sickness raged with great violence among the Indians inhabiting the eastern parts of New England. “Whole towns were depopulated. The living were not able to bury the dead; and their bodies were found lying above ground, many years after. The Massachusetts Indians are said to have been reduced from 30,000 to 300 fighting meti. In 1633, the small pox swept off great numbers,”'

Today it is no surprise that not one in a hundred of my college students has ever heard of the plague. Unless they have read Life and Liberty, students could scarcely come away from these books thinking of Indians as people who made an impact on North America, who lived here in considerable numbers, who settled, in short, and were then killed by disease or arms. Textbook authors have retreated from the candor of Barber. Treatments like that in Triumph

guatantee our collective amnesia.

Having mistreated the plague, the textbooks proceed to mistreat the Pilgrims. Their arrival in Massachusetts poses another historical controversy that textbook authors take pains to duck. The textbooks say the Pilgrims intended to go to Virginia, where there existed a British settlement already. But “the little party on the Mayflower” explains American History, “never reached Virginia. On November 9, they sighted land on Cape Cod.” How did the Pilgrims wind up in Massachusetts when they set out for Virginia? “Violent storms blew their ship off course,” according to some textbooks; others blame an “error in navi gation.” Both explanations may be wrong. Some historians believe the Dutch bribed the captain of the Mayflower to sail north so the Pilgrims would not settle near New Amsterdam. Others hold that the Pilgrims went to Cape Cod on purpose.

Bear in mind that the Pilgrims numbered only about 35 of the 102 settlers aboard the May/lower; the rest were ordinary folk seeking their fortunes in the new Virginia colony. George Willison has argued that the Pilgrim leaders, wanting to be far from Anglican control, never planned to settle in Virginia. They had debated the relative merits of Guiana, in South America, versus the Massachusetts coast, and, according to Willison, they intended a hijacking.

Certainly the Pilgrims already knew quite a bit about what Massachusetts could offer them, from the fine fishing along Cape Cod to that “wonderful plague,” which offered an unusual opportunity for British settlement. According to some historians, Squanto, an Indian from the village of Patuxet, Massachusetts, had provided Ferdinando Gorges, a leader of the Plymouth Company in England, with a detailed description of the area. Gorges may even have sent Squanto and Capt. Thomas Dermer as advance men to wait for the Pilgrims, although Dermer sailed away when the Pilgrims were delayed in England. In any event, the Pilgrims were familiar with the area's topography. Recently published maps that Samuel de Champlain had drawn when he had toured the area in 1605 supplemented the information that had been passed on by sixteenth-century explorers, John Smith had studied the region and named it “New England” in 1614, and he even offered to guide the Pilgrim leaders. They rejected his services as too expensive and carried his guidebook along instead.

These considerations prompt me to believe that the

Pilgrim leaders probably ended up in Massachusetts on purpose. But evidence for any conclusion is , soft. Some historians believe Gorges took credit for landing in Massachusetts after the fact. Indeed, the May/Sower may have had no specific destination. Readers might be fascinated if textbook authors presented two or more of the various possibilities, but, as usual, exposing students to historical controversy is I taboo. Each textbook picks just one reason and presents it as fact.

L Among the Pilgrims' sources of information about New England were probably the maps of Samuel de Champlain, inducting this chart of Patuxet (Plymouth) when it was still an Indian village, before the plague of 1617.

Only one of the twelve textbooks adheres to the hijacking possibility. “The New England landing came as a rude surprise for the bedraggled and tired [non-Pilgrim] majority on board the Mayflower” says Land ofPromise. “[They] had joined the expedition seeking economic opportunity in the Virginia tobacco plantations.” Obviously, these passengers were not happy at having been taken elsewhere, especially to a shore with no prior English settlement to join. “Rumors of mutiny spread quickly.” Promise then ties this unrest to the Mayflower Compact, giving its readers a fresh interpretation of why the colonists adopted the agreement and why it was so democratic: “To avoid rebellion, the Pilgrim leaders made a remarkable concession to the other colonists. They issued a call for every male on board, regardless of religion or economic status, to join in the creation of a 'civil body politic.'” The compact achieved its purpose: the majority acquiesced.

Actually, the hijacking hypothesis does not show the Pilgrims in such a bad light. The compact provided a graceful solution to an awkward problem.

Although hijacking and false representation doubtless were felonies then as now, the colony did survive with a lower death rate than Virginia, so no permanent harm was done. The whole story places the Pilgrims in a somewhat dishonorable light, however, which may explain why only one textbook selects it.

The “navigation error” story lacks plausibility: the one parameter of ocean travel that sailors could and did measure accurately in that era was latitudedistance north or south from rhe equator. The “storms” excuse is perhaps still less plausible, for if a storm blew them off course, when the

weather cleared they could have turned southward again, sailing out to sea to bypass any shoals. They had plenty of food and beer, after all.51 But storms and pilot error leave the Pilgrims pure of heart, which may explain why the other eleven textbooks choose one of the two.

Regardless of motive, the Mayflower Compact provided a democratic basis for the Plymouth colony Since the framers of our Constitution in fact paid the compact little heed, however, it hardly deserves the attention textbook authors lavish on it. But textbook authors clearly want to package the Pilgrims as a pious and moral band who laid the antecedents of our democratic traditions. Nowhere is this motive more embarrassingly obvious than in John Garraty's American History. “So far as any record shows, this was the first time in human history that a group of people consciously created a government where none had existed before,” Here Garraty paraphrases a Forefathers' Day speech, delivered in Plymouth in 1802, in which John Adams celebrated “the only instance in human history of that positive, original social compact.” George Willison has dryly noted that Adams was “blinking several salient factsabove all, the circumstances that prompted the compact, which was plainly an instrument of minority rule.” Of course, Garraty's paraphrase also exposes his ignorance of the Republic of Iceland, the Iroquois Confederacy, and countless other polities antedating 1620. Such an account simply invites students to become ethnocentric.

In their pious treatment of the Pilgrims, history textbooks introduce the archetype of American exceptionalism. According to Tbt American Pageant, “This rare opportunity for a great social and political experiment may never come again.” The American Way declares, “The American people have created a unique nation.” How is America exceptional? Surely we're exceptionally good. As Woodrow Wilson put ic, “America is the only idealistic nation in the world.”" And the goodness started at Plymouth Rock, according to our textbooks, which view the Pilgrims as Christian, sober, democratic, generous to the Indians, Godthanking. Such a happy portrait can be painted only by omitting the facts about the plague, the possible hijacking, and the Indian relations.

For that matter, our culture and our textbooks underplay or omit Jamestown and the sixteenth-century Spanish settlements in favor of Plymouth Rock as the archetypal

birthplace of the United States. Virginia, according to T. H. Breen, “ill-served later historians in search of the mythic origins of American culture,” Historians could hardly tout Virginia as moral in intent; in the words of the first history of Virginia written by a Virginian: “The chief Design of all Parties concern'd was to fetch away the Treasure from thence, aiming more at sudden Gain, than to form any regular Colony.”“ The Virginians' relations with the Indians were particularly unsavory: in contrast to Scjuanto, a volunteer, the British in Virginia took Indian prisoners and forced them to teach colonists how to farm.” In 1623 the British indulged in the first use of chemical warfare in the colonies when negotiating a treaty with tribes near the Potomac River, headed by Chiskiack. The British offered a toast “symbolizing eternal friendship,” whereupon the chief, his family, advisors, and two hundred followers dropped dead of poison." Besides, the early Virginians engaged in bickering, sloth, even cannibalism. They spent their early days digging random holes in the ground, haplessly looking for gold instead of planting crops. Soon they were starving and digging up putrid Indian corpses to eat or renting themselves out to Indian families as servantshardly the heroic founders that a great nation requires.

Textbooks indeed cover the Virginia colony, and they at least mention the Spanish settlements, but they devote 50 percent more space to Massachusetts. As a result, and due also to Thanksgiving, of course, students are much more likely to remember the Pilgrims as our founders.59 They are then embarrassed when I remind them of Virginia and the Spanish, for when prompted students do recall having heard of both. But neither our culture nor our text books give Virginia the same archetypal status as Massachusetts. That is why almost all my students know the name of the Pilgrims' ship, while almost no students remember the names of the three ships that brought the British to Jamestown. (For the next time you're on Jeopardy, they were the Susan Constant, the Discovery, and the Goodspeed)

Despite having ended up many miles from other European enclaves, the Pilgrims hardly “started from scratch” in a “wilderness.” Throughout southern New England, Native Americans had repeatedly burned the underbrush, creating a parklike environment. After landing at Provincetown, the Pilgrims assembled a boat for exploring and began looking around for their new home.

They chose Plymouth because of its beautiful cleared fields, recently planted in corn, and its useful harbor and "brook of fresh water." It was a lovely site for a town. Indeed, until the plague, it had been a town, for "New Plimoth" was none other than Squanto's village of Patuxet! The invaders followed a pattern: throughout the hemisphere Europeans pitched camp right in the middle of Native populationsCu;co, Mexico City, Natchez, Chicago. Throughout New England, colonists appropriated Indian cornfields for their initial settlements, avoiding the backbreaking labor of clearing the land of forest and rock.60 (This explains why, to this day, the names of so many towns throughout the region Marshfield, Springfield, Deerfieldend in field) "Errand into the wilderness" may have made a lively sermon title in 1650, a popular book title in 1950, and an archetypal textbook phrase in 1990, but it was never accurate. The new settlers encountered no wilderness: "in this bay wherein we live," one colonist noted in 1622, "in former time hath lived about two thousand Indians."

Moreover, not all the Native inhabitants had perished, and the survivors now facilitated British settlement. The Pilgrims began receiving Indian assistance on their second full day in Massachusetts. A colonist's journal tells of sailors discovering two Indian houses:

Having their guns and hearing nobody, they entered the houses and found the people were gone. The sailors took some things but didn't dare stay. . . . We had meant to have left some beads and other things in the houses as a sign of peace and to show we meant to trade with them. But we didn't do it because we left in such haste. But as soon as we can meet with the Indians, we will pay them well for what we took.

It wasn't only houses that the Pilgrims robbed. Our eyewitness resumes his story:

We marched to the place we called Cornhill, where we had found the corn before. At another place we had seen before, we dug and found some more com, two or three baskets full, and a bag of beans. ... In all we had about ten bushels, which will be enough for seed. It was with God's help that we found this corn, for how else could we have done it, without meeting some Indians who might trouble us.

From the start, the Pilgrims thanked God, not the Indians, for assistance chat the! latter had (inadvertently) provided-setting a pattern for later thanksgivingiH Our journalist

continues:

The next morning, we found a place like a grave. We decided to dig it up. We found first a mat, and under thai a fine bow, ... We also found bowls, trays, dishes, and things like that. We took several of the prettiest things to carry away with us, and covered the body up again,

A place “like a grave”! Although Karen Kupperman says the Pilgrims continued to rob graves for years, more help came from a live Indian, Squanto. Here my students return to familiar turf, for they have all learned the Squanto legend. Land ofPromise provides a typical account:

Squanto had learned their language, he explained, from English fishermen who ventured into the New England waters each summer. Squanto taught the Pilgrims how to plant corn, squash, and pumpkins. Would the small band of settlers have survived without Squanto's help? We cannot say. But by the fall of 1621, colonists and Indians could sit down to several days of feast and thanksgiving to God (later celebrated as the first Thanksgiving).

What do the books leave out about Squanto? First, how he learned English. According to Ferdinando Gorges, around 1605 a British captain stole Squanto, who was then still a boy, along with four Penobscots, and took them to England. There Squanto spent nine years, three in the employ of Gorges. At length, Gorges helped Squanio arrange passage back to Massachusetts. Some historians doubt that Squanto was among the five Indians stolen in 1605.M All sources agree, however, that in 1614 a British slave raider seized Squanto and two dozen fellow Indians and sold them into slavery in Malaga, Spain. What happened next makes Ulysses look like a homebody. Squanto escaped from slavery, escaped from Spain, and made his way back to England. After trying to get home via Newfoundland, in 1619 he talked Thomas Dermer into taking him along on his next trip to Cape Cod.

It happens that Squanto's fabulous odyssey provides a “hook” into the plague story, a hook that our textbooks choose not to use. For now Squanto set foot again on Massachusetts soil and walked to his home village of Patuxet, only to make the horrifying discovery that “he was the sole member ofhis village still alive. All the others had perished in the epidemic two years before,”65 No wonder Squanto threw in his lot with the Pilgrims.

Squanto's travels acquainted him with more of the world than any Pilgrim encountered. He had crossed the Atlantic

perhaps six times, twice as a British captive, and had lived in Maine, Newfoundland, Spain, and England, as well as Massachusetts.

Now that is a story worth telling! Compare the pallid account in Land of Promise: “He had learned their language from English fishermen.”

As translator, ambassador, and technical advisor, Squanto was essential io the survival of Plymouth in its first two years. Like other Europeans in America, the Pilgrims had no idea what to eat or how to raise or find it until Indians showed them. William Bradford called Squanto “a special instrument sent of God for their good beyond their expectation. He directed them how to set their corn, where to take fish, and to procure other commodities, and was also their pilot to bring them to unknown places for their profit.” Squanto was not the Pilgrims' only aide: in the summer of 1621 Massasoit sent another Indian, Hobomok, to live among the Pilgrims for several years as guide and ambassador.

“Their profit” was the primary reason most Mayflower colonists made the trip. As Robert Moore has pointed out, “Textbooks neglect to analyze the profit motive underlying much of our history.”67 Profit too came from the Indians, by way of the fur trade, without which Plymouth would never have paid for itself. Hobomok helped Plymouth set up fur trading posts at the mouth of the Penob scot and Kennebec rivers in Maine; in Aptucxet, Massachusetts; and in Windso Connecticut.08 Europeans had neither the skill nor the desire to “go boldly where none dared go before,” They went to the Indians.

All this brings us to Thanksgiving. Throughout the nation every fall, elementary school children reenact a little morality play, The First Thanksgiving, as our national origin myth, complete with Pilgrim hats made out of construction paper and Indian braves with feathers in their hair. Thanksgiving is the occasion on which we give thanks to God as a nation for the blessings that He [sic] hath bestowed upon us. More than any other celebration, more even than such overtly patriotic holidays as Independence Day and Memorial Day, Thanksgiving celebrates our ethnocentrism. We have seen, for example, how King James and the early Pilgrim leaders gave thanks for the plague, which proved to them that God was on their side. The archetypes associated with ThanksgivingGod on our side, civilization wrested from wilderness, order from disorder, through hard work and good

Pilgrim character traits-continue to radiate from our history textbooks. More than sixty years ago, in an analysis of how American history was taught in the 1920s, Bessie Pierce pointed out the political uses to which Thanksgiving is put: “For these unexcelled blessings, the pupil is urged to follow in the footsteps of his forbears, to offer unquestioning obedience to the law of the land, and to carry on the work begun.”

Thanksgiving dinner is a ritual, with all the characteristics that Mircea Eliade assigns to the ritual observances of origin myths:

1. It constitutes the history of the acts of the founders, the Supernatural. 2. It is considered to be true. 3. It tells how an institution came into existence. 4. In performing the ritual associated with the myth, one "'experiences'

knowledge of the origin“ and claims one's patriarchy. 5. Thus one ”lives" the myth, as a religion.

My Random House dictionary lists as its main heading for the Plymouth colonists not Pilgrims but Pilgrim Fathers. The Library of Congress similarly catalogs its holdings for Plymouth under Pilgrim Fathm, and of course fathers is capitalized, meaning “fathers of our country,” not of Pilgrim children. Thanksgiving has thus moved from history into the field of religion, “civil religion,” as Robert Bellah has called it. To Bellah, civil religions hold society together. Plymouth Rock achieved iconographic status around 1880, when some enterprising residents of the town rejoined its two pieces on the waterfront and built a Greek templet around it. The templet became a shrine, the Mayflower Compact became a sacred text, and our textbooks began to play the same function as the Anglican Book ofCommon Prayer, teaching us the meaning behind the civil rite of Thanksgiving.

The religious character of Pilgrim history shines forth in an introduction by Valerian Paget to William Bradford's famous chronicle OfPlimoth Plantation: “The eyes of Europe were upon this little English handful of unconscious heroes and saints, taking courage from them step by step. For their children's children the same ideals of Freedom burned so clear and strong that ... the little episode we have just been contemplating, resulted in the birth of the United States of America, and, above all, of the establishment of the humanitarian ideals it typifies, and for which the Pilgrims offered their sacrifice upon the altar of the Sonship of Man.” In this invocation, the Pilgrims supply not only the origin of

the United States, but also the inspiration for democracy in Europe and perhaps for all goodness in the world today! I suspect that the original colonists, Separatists and Anglicans alike, would have been amused.

The civil ritual we practice marginalizes Indians. Our archetypal image of the first Thanksgiving portrays the groaning boards in the woods, with the Pilgrims in their starched Sunday best next to their almost naked Indian guests. As a holiday greeting card puts it, “I is for the Indians we invited to share our food.” The silliness of all this reaches its zenith in the handouts that schoolchildren have carried home for decades, complete with captions such as, “They served pumpkins and turkeys and corn and squash. The Indians had never seen such a feast!” When the Native American novelist Michael Dorris's son brought home this “information” from his New Hampshire elementary school, Dorris pointed out that “the Pilgrims had literally never seen 'such a feast,' since all foods mentioned are exclusively indigenous to the Americas and had been provided by [or with the aid of] the local tribe.”

This notion that “we” advanced peoples provided for the Indians, exactly the converse of the truth, is not benign. It reemerges time and again in our history to complicate race relations. For example, we are told that white plantation owners furnished food and medical care for their slaves, yet every shred of food, shelter, and clothing on the plantations was raised, built, woven, or paid for by black labor. Today Americans believe as part of our political understanding of the world that we are the most generous nation on earth in terms of foreign aid, j overlooking the fact that the net dollar flow from almost every Third World nation runs coward the United States.

The true history of Thanksgiving reveals embarrassing facts. The Pilgrims did not introduce the tradition; Eastern Indians had observed autumnal harvest celebrations for centuries. Although George Washington did set aside days for national thanksgiving, our modern celebrations date back only to 1863. During the Civil War, when the Union needed all the patriotism that such an observance might muster, Abraham Lincoln proclaimed Thanksgiving a national holiday. The Pilgrims had nothing to do with it; not until the 1890s did they even get included in the tradition. For that matter, no one used the term Pilgrims until the 1870s.

The ideological meaning American history has ascribed to

Thanksgiving compounds the embarrassment. The Thanksgiving legend makes Americans ethnocentric After all, if our culture has God on its side, why should we consider other cultures seriously? This ethnocentrism intensified in the middle of the last century. In Race and Manifest Destiny, Reginald Horsman has shown how the idea of "God on our side" was used to legitimate the open expression of Anglo-Saxon superiority vis-a-vis Mexicans, Native Americans, peoples of the Pacific, Jews, and even Catholics.7 Today, when textbooks promote this ethnocentrism with their Pilgrim stories, they leave students less able to learn from and deal with people from other cultures.

On occasion, we pay a more direct cost: censorship. In 1970, for example, the Massachusetts Department of Commerce asked the Wampanoags to select a speaker to mark the 350th anniversary of the Pilgrims' landing. Frank James "was selected, but first he had to show a copy of his speech to the white people in charge of the ceremony. When they saw what he had written, they would not allow him to read it."77 James had written:

Today is a time of celebrating for you . . . but it is not a time of celebrating for me. It is with heavy heart that I look back upon what happened to my People. . , . The Pilgrims had hardly explored the shores of Cape Cod four days before they had robbed the graves of my ancestors, and stolen their corn, wheat, and beans, . . . Massasoit, the grear leader of the Wampanoag, knew these facts; yei he and his People welcomed and befriended the settlers , . , , little knowing that. . . before 50 years were to pass, the Wampanoags . . . and other Indians living near the settlers would be killed by their guns or dead from diseases that we caught from them. . . . Although our way of life is almost gone and our language is almost extinct, we the Wampanoags still walk the lands of Massachusetts.. .. What has happened cannot be changed, but today we work toward a better America, a more Indian America where people and nature once again are important.

What the Massachusetts Department of Commerce censored was not some incendiary falsehood but historical truth. Nothing James would have said, had he been allowed to speak, was false, excepting the word wbeai. Our textbooks also omit the facts about grave robbing, Indian enslavement, the plague, and so on, even though they were common knowledge in colonial New England. For at least a century Puritan ministers thundered their interpretation of the

meaning of the plague from New England pulpits. Thus our popular history of the Pilgrims has not been a process of gaining perspective but of deliberate forgetting. Instead of these important facts, textbooks supply the feel-good minutiae of Squanto's helpfulness, his name, the fish in the cornhills, sometimes even the menu and the number of Indians who attended the prototypical first Thanksgiving,

I have focused here on untoward detail only because our histories have suppressed everything awkward for so long. The Pilgrims' courage in setting forth in the late fall to make their way on a continent new to them remains unsurpassed. In their first year the Pilgrims, like the Indians, suffered from diseases, including scurvy and pneumonia; half of them died. It was not immoral of the Pilgrims to have taken over Patuxet. They did not cause the plague and were as baffled as to its origin as the stricken Indian villagers. Massasoit was happy that the Pilgrims were using the bay, for the Patuxet, being dead, had no more need for the site. Pilgrim-Indian relations started reasonably positively. Ply mouth, unlike many other colonies, usually paid the Indians fot the land it took. In some instances Europeans settled in Indian towns because Indians had invited them, as protection against another tribe or a nearby competing European power.79 In sum, U.S. history is no more violent and oppressive than the history of England, Russia, Indonesia, or Burundibut neither is it exceptionally less violent.

The antidote to feel-good history is not feel-bad history but honest and inclusive history. If textbook authors feel compelled to give moral instruction, the way origin myths have always done, they could accomplish this aim by' allowing students to learn both the “good” and the “bad” sides of the Pilgrim tale. Conflict would then become part of the story, and students might discover that the knowledge they gain has implications for their lives today. Correct!

taught, the issues of the era of the first Thanksgiving could help Americans grow more thoughtful and more tolerant, rather than more ethnocentric.

Origin myths do not come cheaply. To glorify the Pilgrims is dangerous. The genial omissions and the invented details with which our textbooks retail the Pilgrim archetype are close cousins of the overt censorship practiced by the Massachusetts Department of Commerce in denying Frank James the right to speak. Surely, in history, “truth should be held sacred, at whatever cost.”

To understand the making of Anglo-America is impossible without close and sustained attention to its indigenous predecessors, allies, and nemeses.

James Axtell The invaders also anticipated, correctly, that other Europeans would question the morality of their enterprise. They therefore [prepared] . . . quantities of propaganda to overpower their own countrymen's scruples. The propaganda gradually took standard form as an ideology with conventional assumptions and semantics. We live with it still.

Francis Jennings1 Memory says, 'I did that.' Pride replies, “I could not have done that.” Eventually,

memory yields.

Friedrich Nietzsche There is not one Indian in the whole of this country who does not cringe in anguish and frustration because of these textbooks. There is not one Indian child who has not come home in shame and tears.

Rupert Costo

Lies My Teacher Told Me

4. Red Eyes

Historically, American Indians have been the most lied-about subset of our population. That's why Michael Dorris said that, in learning about Native Americans, “One does not start from point zero, but from minus ten.”5 High school students start below zero because of their textbooks, which unapologetically present Native Americans through white eyes. Today's textbooks should do better, especially since what historians call Indian history (though really it is interracial) has flowered in the last twenty years, and the information on which new textbooks might be based currently rests on library shelves.

There has been some improvement in textbooks' treatment of Native peoples in recent years. In 1961 the best-selling Rise of ih(American Nation contained ten illustrations featuring Native people, alone or with whites (of 268 illustrations); most of these pictures focused on the themes of primitive life and savage warfare. Twenty-five years later, the retitled Triumph ofthe American Nation contained fifteen illustrations of Indians; more importantly, no longer were Native Ameri cans depicted as one-dimensional primitives. Rather, they were people who participated in struggles to preserve their identities and their land. Included were Metacomet (King Philip), Crispus Attucks (first casualty of the Revolution, who was also part black in ancestry), Sequoyah (who invented the Cherokee alphabet), and Navajo code-talkers in World War II.

Nevertheless, the authors of American history textbooks “need a crash course in cultural relativism and ethnic sensitivity,” according to James Axtell, who criticized textbooks in 1987 for still using such terms as half-breed, mdisacre, and war-whooping6 Reserving milder terms such as frontier initiative and settlers for whites is equally biased. Even worse are the authors' overall interpretations, which continue to be shackled by the “conventional assumptions and semantics” that have “explained” Indian-white relations for centuries. Textbook authors still write history to comfort descendants of the “settlers.”

Our journey into the history of Indian peoples and their

relations with European and African invaders cannot be a happy excursion. Native Americans are not and must not be props in a sort of theme park of the past, where we go to have a good time and see exotic cultures. “What we have done to the peoples who were living in North America” is, according to anthropologist Sol Tax, “our Original Sin,”7 Ifwe look Indian history squarely in the eye, we are going to get red eyes. This is our past, however, and we must acknowledge it. It is time for textbooks to send white children home, if not with red eyes, at least with thought-provoking questions.

Today's textbooks at least try to be accurate about Indian culture. All but two of the twelve textbooks I surveyed begin by devoting more than five pages to pre-contact Native societies,8 And to their credit most of the textbooks recognize diversity among Native societies. They tell about the League of Five Nations among the Iroquois in the Northeast, potlatches among the Northwestern coastal Indians, cliff dwellings in the Southwest, and caste divisions among the Natchez in the Southeast. In the process of presenting ten or twenty different cultures in six or eight pages, however, the textbooks can hardly reach a high level of sophistication. So they seize upon the unusual. No matter that the Choctaws were more numerous and played a much larger role in American j history than the Natchezthey were also more ordinary. Students will not find among the Native Americans portrayed in their history textbooks many “regular folks” with whom they might identify.

American Indian societies pose a special problem for textbooks.9 The authors of history textbooks are consumers, not practitioners, of archaeology, ethnobotany, linguistics, physical anthropology, folklore studies, cultural anthro pology, ethnohistory, and other related disciplines. Scholars in these fields can j tell us much, albeit tentatively, about what happened in the Americas before Europeans and Africans arrived. Unfortunately, the authors of history textbooks j treat archaeology et al. as dead disciplines to be mined for answers. These fields study dead people, to be sure, but they are alive with controversy. Only The j American Adventure admits uncertainty: “This page may be out of date by the time it is read,” Adventure goes on to present claims that humans have been in the Americas for 12,000, 21,000, and 40,000 years. As a result, although Adventure \ is one of the oldest of the twelve textbooks, its

pre-Columbian pages have not j gone out of date.ia Most other textbooks retain their usual authoritative tone. On the matter ofthefirsthumansettlementoftheAmericas,estimatesvaryfrom12,000years I before the present to more than 70,000 B.P.11 Some scientists believe that the I original settlers came in successive waves over thousands of years; genetic sitni! larities convince others that most Natives descended from a single small band,lz The majority of the textbooks choose one position or the other and present it as undisputed fact. Every textbook says something like this, from American History: "The water level of the oceans dropped sharply, exposing a land bridge between Asia and North America." Actually, while most scholars accept a "Beringia" crossing, actual evidence is siim, so we cannot rule out boat crossings, accidental or purposeful. Even if the first Americans arrived on foot, they were just as surely explorers as Columbus. Nonetheless, textbooks picture them as primitives, vaguely Neanderthalian.

This archetype of the primitive savage, not very bright, enmeshed in wars with nature and other humans, drives some of the certainties that textbooks impose on the ancient past. American History tells of "the wanderers" who "moved slowly southward and to the east. . . . Many thousand years passed before they had spread over all of North and South America" Actually, a significant number of archaeologists believe that people reached most parts of the Americas within a thousand years, too rapidly to allow easy archaeological determination of the direction and timing of their migration. "They did not know that they were exploring a new continent," American History goes on, offering no evidence upon which to infer these early Americans' alleged igno rance. The depiction of mental torpor persists as American History continues: "None of the groups made much progress in developing simple machines or substituting mechanical or even animal power for their own muscle power." In Europe and Asia, most pre-1492 machines depended on horses, oxen, water buffalo, mules, or cattlebeasts that were unknown in the Americas, after all.

American History then generalizes: "Those who planted seeds and cultivated the land instead of merely hunting and gathering food were more secure and comfortable." Apparently the author has not encountered the "affluent primitive" theory, which persuaded anthropology some

twenty-five years ago that gatherer-hunters lived quite comfortably, American History completes the evolutionary stereotype: “These agricultural people were mostly peaceful, though they could fight fiercely to protect their fields. The hunters and wanderers, on the other hand, were quite warlike because their need to move about brought them frequently into conflict with other groups.” Here the author betrays the influence of the old savage-to-barbaric-to-civilized school dating back to L. H. Morgan and Karl Marx in the last century. The authors of history textbooks may well have encountered such thinking in anthropology courses when they were undergraduates; it is no longer taught today, however. Decades ago, most anthropologists challenged the outmoded continuum, determining that hunters and gatherers were relatively peaceful, compared to agriculturalists,

and that modern societies were more warlike still. Thus violence increases with civilization.

Today's textbooks do confer civilization on some Natives. Like the Spanish conquistadors themselves, The American Adventure equates wealth and civilization: “Unlike the noncivilized peoples of the Caribbean, the Aztec were rich and prosperous.” Textbooks invariably put the civilization far away, in Mexico, Guatemala, or Peru. By comparison, “Indian life in North America was less advanced,” says The American Pageant. It seems thai, despite good intentions, textbooks cannot resist contrasting “primitive” Americans with modern Europeans, Part of the problem is that the books are really comparing rural America to urban Europe Massachusetts to London. Comparing Tenochtitlan (now Mexico City) to rural Scotland might produce a very different impression, for when Cortez arrived, Tenochtitlan was a city of 100,000 to 300,000 whose central market was so busy and noisy “that it could be heard more than four miles away,” according to Bernal Diaz, who accompanied him.14 Moreover, from the perspective of the average inhabitant, life may have been equally as “advanced” and pleasant in Massachusetts or Scotland as in Aztec Mexico or London.

For a long time Native Americans have been rebuking textbook authors for reserving the adjective civilized for European cultures. In 1927 an organization of Native leaders called the Grand Council Fire of American Indians criticized textbooks as “unjust to the life of our people.” They went on to ask, “What is civilization? Its marks are a noble religion

and philosophy, original arts, stirring music, rich story and legend. We had these. Then we were not savages, but a civilized race."15 Even an appreciative treatment of Native cultures reinforces ethnocentrism so long as it does not challenge the primitive-to-civilized continuum. This continuum inevitably conflates the meaning of civilized in everyday conversation"refined or enlightened"with "having a complex division of labor," the only definition that anthropologists defend. When we consider the continuum carefully, it immediately becomes problematic. Was the Third Reich civilized, for instance? Most anthropologists would answer yes. In what ways do we prefer the civilized Third Reich to the more primitive Arawak nation that Columbus encountered? If we refuse to label the Third Reich civilized, are we not using the tetm to imply a certain comity? If so, we must consider the Arawaks civilized, and we must also consider Columbus and his I Spaniards primitive if not savage. Ironically, societies characterized by a complex division oflabor are often marked by inequality and capable ofsupporting large specialized armies. Precisely these "civilized" societies are likely to resort 10 savage violence in their attempts to conquer "primitive" societies.

Thoughtless use of the "etherizing" terms civilized and trvilizttifm blocks any real inquiry into the world-view or social structure of the "uncivilized" person or society. In 1990 President Bush condemned Iraq's invasion of Kuwait with the words, "The entire civilized world is against Iraq"an irony, in that Iraq's Tigris and Euphrates valleys are the earliest known seat of civilization.

After contact with Europeans and Africans, Indian societies changed rapidly. Native Americans took into their cultures noi only guns, blankets, and kettles, but also new foods, ways of building houses, and ideas from Christianity. Most American history textbooks tell about the changes in only one group, the Plains Indians. Eight of the twelve textbooks I surveyed mention the rapid efflorescence of this colorful culture after the Spaniards introduced the horse to the American West. It is an exhilarating example of syncretismblending elements oftwo different cultures to create something new.

The transformation in the Plains cultures, however, was only the tip of the cultural-change iceberg. An even more profound metamorphosis occurred as Europeans linked Native peoples to the developing world economy. Yet

textbooks make no mention of this process, despite the fact that it continues to affect formerly independent cultures in the last half of our century. In the early 1970s, for example, Lapps in Norway replaced their sled dogs with snowmobiles, only to find themselves vulnerable to Arab oil embargoes.'" The process seems inevitable, hence perhaps is neither to be praised nor decriedbut it should not be ignored, because it is crucial to understanding how Europeans took over America,

In Atlantic North America, members of Indian nations possessed a variety of sophisticated skills, from the ability to weave watertight baskets to an understanding of how certain plants can be used to reduce pain. At first, Native Americans traded corn, beaver, fish, sassafras, and other goods with the French, Dutch, and British, in return for axes, blankets, cloth, beads, and kettles. Soon, however, Europeans persuaded Natives to specialize in the fur and slave trades. Native Americans were better hunters and trappers than Europeans, and with the guns the Europeans sold them, they became better still. Other Native skills began to atrophy. Why spend hours making a watertight basket when in one-tenth the time you could trap enough beavers to trade for a kettle? Even agriculture, which the Native Americans had shown to the Europeans, declined, because it became easier to trade for food than to grow it. Everyone acted in rational self-interest in joining such a systemthat is, Native Americans were not mere victims because everyone's standard ofliving improved, at least in theory.

Some of the rapid changes in eastern Indian societies exemplify syncretism. When the Iroquois combined European guns and Native American tacRED EVES

tics to smash the Hurons, they controlled their own culture and chose which elements of European culture to incorporate, which to modify, which to ignore. Native Americans learned how to repair guns, cast bullets, build stronger forts, and fight to annihilate.19 Native Americans also became well known as linguists, often speaking two European languages (French, English, Dutch, or Spanish) and at least two Indian languages, British colonists sometimes used Natives as interpreters when dealing with the Spanish or French, not just with other Native American nations.

These developments were not all matters of happy economics and voluntary syncretic cultural transformation, however. Natives were operating under a military and cultural threat, and they knew it. They quickly deduced that

European guns were more efficient than their bows and arrows. Europeans soon realized that trade goods could be used to win and maintain political alliances with Indian nations. To deal with the new threat and because whites “demanded institutions reflective of their own with which to relate,” many Native groups strengthened their tribal governments." Chiefs acquired power they had never had before. These governments often ruled unprecedentedly broad areas, because the heightened warfare and the plagues had wiped out smaller tribes or caused them to merge with larger ones for protection. Large nations became ethnic melting pots, taking in whites and blacks as well as other Indians. New confederations and nations developed, such as the Creeks, Seminoles, and Lumbees. The tribes also became more male-dominated, in imitation of Europeans or because of the expanded importance of war skills in their cultures.

Tribes that were closest to the Europeans got guns first, guns that could be trained on interior peoples who had not yet acquired any. Suddenly some nations had a great military advantage over others. The result was an escalation of Indian warfare. Native nations had engaged in conflict before Europeans came, of course. Tribes rarely fought to the finish, however. Some tribes did not want to take over the lands belonging to other nations, partly because each had its own sacred sites. For a nation to exterminate its neighbors was difficult anyway, since all enjoyed the same level of military technology. Now all this changed. European powers deliberately increased Indian warfare by playing one nation off against another. The Spanish, for example, used a divide-and-conquer strategy to defeat the Aztecs in Mexico. In Scotland and Ireland, the English had played tr;'.,es against one another to extend British rule. Now they did the same in North America.

For many tribes the motive for the increased combat was the enslavement of other Indians to sell to the Europeans for more guns and kettles. As northern Ran away from his Master Nathanael Holbrook of Sherburn, on W ednesday the 19th of Sept last, an Indian Lad of about 18 Years of Age, named John Pittarnc; He is pretty well sett and of a guilty Countenance and has short Hair; He had on a grey Coat with Pewter Buttons. Leather Breeches, an old tow Shirt. grey Stockings, good Shoes, and a Felt Hat.

Whoever shall take up the said Servant, and convey him to his Master in Sherburn. shall have Forty Shillings Reward

and all necessary Charges paid. We hear the said Servant intended to change his Name and his Clothes.

Like African slaves, Indian slaves escaped when they could. This notice comes from the Boston Weekly News-Letter for October 4,1739.

tribes specialized in fur, certain southern tribes specialized in people. Some Native Americans had enslaved each other long before Europeans arrived. Now Europeans vastly expanded Indian slavery. Colonists in South Carolina paid nearby Indian nations in guns, ammunition, and other goods, which enabled them to enslave interior nations as far west as Arkansas,

I had expected to find in our textbooks the cliche that Native Americans did not make good slaves, but only two books, Triumph of the American Nation and The American Tradition, say even that. The American Pageant contains a paragraph that at least states the basics“Indian slaves were among the colony's earliest exports”even if it gives no hint of the trade's extent. American History buries a sentence, “A few Indians were enslaved,” in its discussion of the African slave trade. Otherwise, the twelve textbooks are silent on the subject of the Native American slave trade.

The Europeans' enslavement of Native Americans has a long history. Textbooks used in elementary schools tell that Ponce de Leon went to Florida to seek the mythical fountain of youth; they do not say that his main business was to capture slaves for Hispaniola." In New England, Indian slavery led directly to African slavery; the first blacks imported there, in 1638, were brought from the West Indies to be exchanged for Native Americans from Connecticut.28 On the eve of the New York City slave rebellion of 1712, in which Native and African slaves united, about one resident in four was enslaved and one slave in four was Indian. A 1730 census of South Kingston, Rhode Island, showed 935 whites, 333 African slaves, and 223 Native American slaves.

The center of Native American slavery, like African American slavery, was South Carolina. Its population in 1708 included 3,960 free whites, 4,100 African slaves, 1,400 Indian slaves, and 120 indentured servants, presumably white. These numbers do not reflect the magnitude of Native slavery, however, because they omit the export trade. From Carolina, as from New England, colonists sent Indian slaves (who might escape) to the West Indies (where they could never escape), in exchange for black slaves. Charleston

shipped more than 10,000 Natives in chains to the West Indies in one year!30 Further west, so many Pawnee Indians were sold to whites that Pawnee became the name applied in the plains to all slaves, whether they were of Indian or African origin.31 On the West Coast, Pierson Reading, a manager of John Sutler's huge grant of Indian land in central California, extolled the easy life he led in 1844: “The Indians of California make as obedient and humble slaves as the Negro in the south.” In the Southwest, whites enslaved Navajos and Apaches right up to the middle of the Civil War.

Intensified warfare and the slave trade rendered stable settlements no longer safe, helping to deagriculturize Native Americans. To avoid being targets for capture, Indians abandoned their cornfields and their villages and began to live in smaller settlements from which they could more easily escape to the woods. Ultimately, they had to trade with Europeans even for food.53 As Europeans learned from Natives what to grow and how to grow it, they became less dependent upon Indians and Indian technology, while Indians became more dependent upon Europeans and European technology.“ Thus what worked for the Native Americans in the short run worked against them in the long. In the long run, it was Indians who were enslaved, Indians who died, Indian technology that was lost, Indian cultures that fell apart. By the time the pitiful remnant of the Massachuset tribe converted to Christianity and joined the Puritans' ”praying Indian towns,“ they did so in response to an invading culture that told them their religion was wrong and Christianity was right. This process exemplifies what anthropologists call cultural imperialism. Even the proud Plains Indians, whose syncretic culture combined horses and guns from the Spanish with Native an, religion, and hunting styles, showed the effects of cultural imperialism: the Sioux word for white man, wasichu, meant ”one who has everything good.

Figure It Out Study the two drawings below Both were made after the year 1500, but one shows how Indians lived before 1500 and one shows Indian life after 1500. Which shows Indian life before Europeans arrived and which shows Indian lite after? What evidence tells you the date The textbook Life and Liberty is distinguished by its graphic presentation of change in Native societies. It confronts students with this provocative pair of illustrations and asks, “Which shows Indian life before Europeans arrived and

which shows Indian life after? What evidence tells you the date?" Thus Life and Liberty helps students understand that Europeans did not "civilize" or "settle" "roaming" Indians, but had the opposite impact.

To be anthropologically literate about culture contact, students should be familiar with the terms syncretism and cultural imperialism, or at least the concepts they denote. None of the twelve textbooks mentions either term, and most of them explain nothing of the process of cultural change, again except for the Plains Indian horse culture, whjpSi, as a consequence, comes across as unique. Not one textbook tells of the process of incorporation into the global economy, none tells how contact worked to deskill Native Americans, most don't tell of increased Indian warfare, and only The American Pageant even hints at the extent of the Native American slave trade.

Just as American societies changed when they encountered whites, so European societies changed when they encountered Natives. Textbooks completely miss this side of the mutual accommodation and acculturation process. Instead, their view of white-Indian relations is dominated by the archetype of the frontier line. Textbooks present the process as a moving line of white (and black) settlementIndians on one side, whites (and blacks) on the other. Pocahontas and Squanto aside, the Natives and Europeans don't meet much in textbook history, except as whites remove Indians further west. In reality, whites and Native Americans worked together, sometimes lived together, and quarreled with each other for scores and even hundreds of years. For 325 years, after all, from the first permanent Spanish settlement in 1565 to the end of Sioux and Apache autonomy around 1890, independent Native and European nations coexisted in what is now the United States.

The term frontier hardly does justice to this process, for it implies a line or boundary. Contact, not separation, was the rule. Frontier also locates the observer somewhere in the urban East, from which the frontier is "out there." Textbook authors seem not to have encountered the trick question, "Which came first, civilization or the wilderness?" The answer is civilization, for only the "civilized" mind could define the world of Native farmers, fishers, and gatherers and hunters, coexisting with forests, crops, and animals, as a "wilderness," Calling the area beyond secure European control "frontier" or "wilderness" makes it subtly alien. Such

a viewpoint is intrinsically Eurocentric and marginalizes the actions of nonurban people, both Native and non-Native.is The band of interaction was amazingly multicultural. In 1635 “sixteen different languages could be heard among the settlers in New Amsterdam,” languages from North America, Africa, and Europe.57 In 1794, when the zone of contact had reached the eastern Midwest, a single northern Ohio town, “the Glaize,” was made up of hundreds of Shawnee, Miami, and Delaware Indians, British and French traders and artisans, several Nanticokes, Cherokees, and Iroquois, a few African American and white American captives, and whites who had married into or been adopted by Indian families. The Glaize was truly multicultural in its holidays, observing Mardi Gras, St. Patrick's Day, the birthday of the British queen, and Indian celebrations.36 In 1835, when the contact area was near the West Coast, John Sutler, with permission of the Mexican authorities, recruited Native Americans to raise his wheat crop, operate a distillery, a hat factory, and a blanket company, and build a fort (now Sacramento). Procuring uniforms from Russian traders and officers from Europe, Sutler organized a 200-man Indian army, clothed in tsarist uniforms and commanded in German!

Our history textbooks still obliterate the interracial, multicultural nature of frontier life. American History devotes almost a page to Suiter's Fort without ever hinting that Native Americans were anything other than enemies: "Gradually he built a fortified town, which he called Sutler's Fort. The entire place was surrounded by a thick wall 18 feet high (about 6 meters) topped with cannon for protection against unfriendly Indians,

The historian Gary Nash tells us that interculturation took place from the start in Virginia, “facilitated by the fact that some Indians lived among the English as day laborers, while a number of settlers fled to Indian villages rather than endure the rigors of life among the autocratic English.”40 Indeed, many white and black newcomers chose to live an Indian lifestyle. In his Letters from an American Farmer, Michel Guillaume Jean de Crevecoeur wrote, “There must be in the Indians' social bond something singularly captivating, and far superior to be boasted of among us; for thousands of Europeans are Indians, and we have no examples of even one of those Aborigines having from choice become Europeans.”41 Crevecoeur overstated his case: as we know from Squanto's example, some Natives chose to live among

whites from the beginning. The migration was mostly the other way, however. As Benjamin Franklin put it, “No European who has tasted Savage Life can afterwards bear to live in our societies.”

Europeans were always trying to stop the outflow. Hernando De Soto had to post guards to keep his men and women from defecting to Native societies. The Pilgrims so feared Indianization that they made it a crime for men to wear long hair. “People who did run away to the Indians might expect very extreme punishments, even up to the death penalty,” if caught by whites.3 Nonetheless, right up to the end of independent Indian nationhood in 1890, whites con tinued to defect, and whites who lived an Indian lifestyle, such as Daniel Boone, became cultural heroes in white society.

Communist Eastern Europe erected an Iron Curtain to stop its outflow but could never explain why, if Communist societies were the most progressive on earth, they had to prevent people from defecting, American colonial embarrassment similarly went straight to the heart of their ideology, also an ideology of progress. Textbooks in Eastern Europe and the United States have handled the problem in the same wÈ. by omitting the facts. Not one American history textbook mentions the attraction of Native societies to European Americans and African Americans,

African Americans frequently fled to Indian societies to escape bondage. What did whites find so alluring? According to Benjamin Franklin, “All their government is by Counsel of the Sages. There is no Force; there are no Prisons, no officers to compel Obedience, or inflict Punishment.” Probably foremost, the lack of hierarchy in the Native societies in the eastern United States attracted the admiration of European observers.44 Frontiersmen were taken with the extent to which Native Americans enjoyed freedom as individuals. Women were also accorded more status and power in most Native societies than in white societies of the time, which white women noted with envy in captivity narratives. Although leadership was substantially hereditary in some nations, most Indian societies north of Mexico were much more democratic than Spain, France, or even England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. “There is not a Man in the Ministry of the Five Nations, who has gain'd his Office, otherwise than by Merit,” waxed Lt. Gov, Cadwallader Colden of New York in 1727. “Their Authority is only the

Esteem of the People, and ceases the Moment that Esteem is lost." Colden applied to che Iroquois terms redolent of "the natural rights of mankind": "Here we see the natural Origin of all Power and Authority among a free People."

After Col. Henry Bouquet defeated the Ohio Indians at Bushy Run in 1763, tie demanded the release of all white captives. Most of them, especially the children, had to be 'bound hand and foot" and forcibly returned to white society. Meanwhile the Native prisoners "went back to their defeated relations with great signs of joy," in tine words of the anthropologist Frederick Turner {in Beyond Geography, 245). Turner rightly calls these scenes "infamous and embarrassing.

Indeed, Native American ideas may be partly responsible for our democratic institutions. We have seen how Native ideas of liberty, fraternity, and equality found their way to Europe to influence social philosophers such as Thomas More, Locke, Montaigne, Montesquieu, and Rousseau. These European thinkers then influenced Americans such as Franklin, Jefferson, and Madison.46 In recent years historians have debated whether Indian ideas may also have influenced our democracy more directly. Through 150 years of colonial contact, the Iroquols League stood before the colonies as an object lesson in how to govern a large domain democratically. The terms used by Lt. Gov. Golden find an echo in our Declaration of Independence fifty years later.

In the 1740s the Iroquois wearied of dealing with several often bickering English colonies and suggested that the colonies form a union similar to the league. In 1754 Benjamin Franklin, who had spent much time among the Iroquois observing their deliberations, pleaded with colonial leaders to consider the Albany Plan of Union: "It would be a strange thing if six nations of ignorant savages should be capable of forming a scheme for such a union and be able to execute it in such a manner as that it has subsisted ages and appears insoluble; and yet that a like union should be impracticable for ten or a dozen English colonies."

The colonies rejected the plan. But it was a forerunner of the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution. Both the Continental Congress and the Constitutional Convention referred openly to Iroquois ideas and imagery. In 1775 Congress formulated a speech to the Iroquois, signed by John Hancock, that quoted Iroquois advice from 1744. "The Six Nations are a wise people," Congress wrote, "let us harken to

their council and teach our children to follow it."4S John Mohawk has argued that American Indians are directly or indirectly responsible for the public-meeting tradition, free speech, democracy, and "all those things which got attached to the Bill of Rights." Without the Native example, "do you really believe that all those ideas would have found birth among a people who had spent a millennium butchering other people because of intolerance of questions of religion?"40 Mohawk may have overstated the case for Native democracy, since heredity played a major role in office-holding in many Indian societies. His case is strengthened, however, by the fact that wherever Europeans went in the Americas, they projected monarchs ("King Philip") or other undemocratic leaders onto Native societies. To some degree, this pro jecting was done out of European self-interest, so they could claim to have purchased tribal land as a result of dealing with one person or faction. The practice As a symbol of the new United States, Americans chose the eagle clutching a bundle of arrows. They knew that both the eagle and the arrows were symbols of the Iroquois League. Although one arrow is easily broken, no one can break six (or thirteen) at once.

also betrayed habitual European thought: Europeans could not believe (hat nations did not have such rulers, since that was the only form of government they knew.

For a hundred years after our Revolution, Americans credited Native Americans as a source of their democratic institutions. Revolutionary-era cartoonists used images of Indians to represent the colonies against Britain. Virginia's patriot rifle companies wore Indian clothes and moccasins as they fought the redcoats. When colonists took action to oppose unjust authority, as in the Boston Tea Party or the anti-rent protests against Dutch plantations in the Hudson River valley during the 1840s, they chose to dress as Indians, not to blame Indians for the demonstrations but to appropriate a symbol identified with liberty.

Of course, Dutch traditions influenced Plymouth as well as New York. So did British common law and the Magna Carta. American democracy seems to be another example of syncretism, combining ideas from Europe and Native America, The degree of Native influence is hard to specify, since that influence came through several sources. Textbooks might, present it as a soft hypothesis rather than hard fact. But they should not leave it out. In the twelve textbooks I

surveyed, discussion of any intellectual influence of Native Americans on European Americans was limited to Discovering American History, which pictures a wampum belt paired with Benjamin Franklin's famous cartoon of a divided, hence dying snake. “Franklin's Albany Plan might have been inspired by the Iroquois League,” captions Discovering. “The wampum belt expresses the unity of tribes achieved through the League, Compare it with Franklin's cartoon.” The other eleven books are silent.

But, then, the books leave out most contributions ofNative Americans to the modern world. I had expected to find at least such noncontroversial items as food, words, and place names. After all, our regional cuisinesthe dishes that make American food distinctiveoften combine Indian with European and African elements. Examples range from New England pork and beans to New Orleans gumbo to Texas chili.51 Mutual acculturation between Native and African Americans-due to shared experience in slavery as well as escapes by blacks to Native communitiesaccounts for soul food being part Indian, from cornbread and grits to greens and hush puppies.“ Historians have known for centuries that Indians of the Americas domesticated more than half of the food crops now grown around the world. Native place names dot our landscape, from Okefenokee to Alaska. Even nineteenth-century racists relished names like Mississippi, meaning ”Great River." From hurricane to skunk to (probably) OK, Indian words have been incorporated into English.53 Notwithstanding all this, only Land of Promise and Triumph of the Amtricdn Nation discuss Indian foods, only Triumph mentions Indian names, and none of the twelve books deals with Indian words.

Transmitting food and names, mundane though it may seem, involves ideas. Native farming methods were not “primitive.” Indian farmers in some tribes drew rwo or three times as much nourishment from the soil as we do.54 Place names, too, show intellectual interchange. Whites had to be asking Indians, “Where am I?” “What is this place called?” “What is that animal?” “What is the name of that mountain?” Although textbooks “appreciate” Native cultures, the possibility of real interculturation, especially in matters of the intellect, is foreign to them. This is a shame, for authors thereby ignore much of what has made America distinctive from Europe. In a travel narrative, Peter Kalm wrote in 1750, “The French, English, Germans, Dutch, and other Europeans,

who have lived for several years in distant provinces, near and among the Indians, grow so like them in their behavior and thought that they can only be distinguished by the difference of their color."55 In the famous essay, "The Frontier in American History," Frederick Jackson Turner told how the frontier masters the European, "strips off the garments of civilization," and requires him to be an Indian in thought as well as dress. "Before long he has gone to planting Indian corn and plowing with a sharp stick." Gradually he builds something new, "but the outcome is not the old Europe." It is syncretic; it is American.

Acknowledging how aboriginal we are culturally-how the United States and Europe, too, have been influenced by Native American as well as European ideas-would require significant textbook rewriting. If we recognized American In the nineteenth century Americans knew of Native American contributions to medicine. Sixty percent of all medicines patented in the century were distributed bearing Indian images, including Kickapoo Indian Cough Cure, Kickapoo Indian Sagwa, and Kickapoo Indian Oil. In this century America has repressed the image of Indian as healer.

Indians as important intellectual antecedents of our political structure, we would have to acknowledge that acculturation has been a two-way street, and we might have to reassess the assumption of primitive Indian culture that legitimates the entire conquest." In 1970 the Indian Historian Press produced a critique of our histories, Textbooks and the American Indian. One of the press's yardsticks for evaluating books was the question, "Does the textbook describe the religions, philosophies, and contributions to thought of the American Indian?"58 A quarter-century later the answer must still be no.

Consider how textbooks treat Native religions as a unitary whole. The American Way describes Native American religion in these words:

These Native Americans [in the Southeast] believed that nature was filled with spirits. Each form of life, such as plants and animals, had a spirit. Earth and air held spirits too. People were never alone. They shared their lives with the spirits of nature.

Way is trying to show respect for Native American religion, but it doesn't work. Stated flatly like this, the beliefs seem like make-believe, not the sophisticated theology of a higher civilization. Let us try a similarly succinct summary of

the beliefs of many Christians today.

These Americans believed that one great male god ruled ihe world. Sometimes they divided him into three parts, which they called father, son, and holy ghost. They ate crackers and wine or grape juice, believing that they were eating the son's body and drinking his blood. If they believed strongly enough, they would live on forever after they died.

Textbooks never describe Christianity this way. It's offensive. Believers would immediately argue that such a depiction fails to convey the symbolic meaning or the spiritual satisfaction ofcommunion.

Textbooks could present American Indian religions from a perspective that takes them seriously as attractive and persuasive belief systems. The anthropologist Frederick Turner has pointed out that when whites remark upon the fact that Indians perceive a spirit in every animal or rock, they are simultaneously admitting their own loss of a deep spiritual relationship with the earth. Native Americans are "part of the total living universe," wrote Turner; "spiritual health is to be had only by accepting this condition and by attempting to live in accordance with it." Turner contends that this life-view is healthier than European alternatives: "Ours is a shockingly dead view of creation. We ourselves are the only things in the universe to which we grant an authentic vitality, and because of this we are not fully alive."6" Thus Turner shows that taking Native American religions seriously might require re-examination of the Judeo-Christtan tradition. No textbook would suggest such a controversial idea.

Similarly, textbooks give readers no clue as to what the zone of contact was like from the Native side. They emphasize Native Americans such as Squanto and Pocahontas, who sided with the invaders. And they invert the terms, picturing white aggressors as "settlers" and often showing Native settlers as aggressors. "The United States Department of Interior had tried to give each tribe both land and money," says The American Way, describing the U.S. policy of forcing tribes to cede most of their land and retreat to reservations. Whites were baffled by Native ingratitude at being "offered" this land, Way claims: "White Americans could not understand the Indians, To them, owning land was a dream come true." In reality, whites of the time were hardly baffled. Even Gen. Philip Sheridanwho is notorious for having said, "The only good Indian is a dead

Indian"understood. "We took away their country and their means of support, and it was for this and against this they made war," he wrote. "Could anyone expect less?" The textbooks have turned history upside down.

Let us try a right-side-up view. "After King Philip's War, there was continuous conflict at the edge of New England. In Vermont the settlers worried about savages scalping them." This description is accurate, provided the reader understands that the settlers were Native American, the scalpers white. Even the best of our American history books fail to show the climate of white actions within which Native Americans on the border of white control had to live. It was so bad, and Natives had so little recourse, that the Catawbas in North Carolina "fled in every direction" in 1786 when a solitary white man rode into their village unannounced. And the Catawbas were a friendly tribe!

From the opposite coast, here is a story that might help make such dispersal understandable: "An old white settler told his son who was writing about life on the Oregon frontier about an incident he recalled from the cowboys and Indians days. Some cowboys came upon Indian families without their men present. The cowboys gave pursuit, planning to rape the squaws, as was the custom. One woman, however, pushed sand into her vagina to thwart her pursuers."65 The act of resistance is what made the incident memorable. Otherwise, it was entirely ordinary. Such ordinariness is what our textbooks leave out. They do not challenge our archetypal Laura Ingalls Wilder picture of peaceful white settlers suffering occasional attacks by brutal Indians, If they did, the fact thai so many tribes resorted to war, even after 1815 when resistance was clearly doomed, would become understandable.

Our history is full of wars with Native American nations. But not our history textbooks. "For almost two hundred years," notes David Horowitz, "almost continuous warfare raged on the American continent, its conflict more threatening than any the nation was to face again." Indian warfare absorbed 80 percent of the entire federal budget during George Washington's administration and dogged his successors for a century as a major issue and expense. Yet most ofour "Indian Massacre at Wilkes-Barre" shows a motif common m nineteenth-century lithographs: Indians invading the sanctity of the white settlers' homes. Actually whites were invading Indian lands and often Indian homes, but pictures

such as this, not the reality, remain the archetype.

textbooks barely mention the topic. The American Pageant offers a table of “Total Costs and Number of Battle Deaths of Major U.S. Wars” that completely omits Indian wars! Pageant includes the Spanish-American War, according it a toll of 385 battle deaths, but leaves out the Ohio War of 1790-95, which cost 630 dead and missing U.S. troops in a single battle, the Battle of Wabash River.

At least today's textbooks no longer blame the Natives for all the violence, as did most textbooks written before the civil rights movement. Historians used to say, “Civilized war is the kind we fight against them, whereas savage war is the atrocious kind that they fight against us.”" Not one of the twelve history books I examined portrays Natives as savages. The authors are careful to admit brutality on both sides. Some of the books mention the massacres of defenseless Native Americans at Sand Creek and Wounded Knee.

Like the legacy of slavery, the legacy of conquest persists, however. Indeed, conquest ended more recently than slavery, outlasting that unfortunate institution by a quatier-century. Slavery is now taken seriously in our histories;

conquest still is not.66 In this sense, the American Indian Movement, unlike the civil rights movement, has failed. Our textbooks do not teach against the archetype of the savage Indian that pervades popular culture. On the contrary, textbooks give very little attention of any kind to Indian wars.

As a result, my college students still come up with savagewhen I ask them for five adjectives that apply to Indians. Like much of our “knowledge” about Native Americans, the “savage” stereotype comes particularly from Western movies and novels, such as the popular “Wagons West” series by Dana Fullet Ross. These paperbacks, which have sold hundreds of thousands of copies, claim boldly, “The general outlines of history have been faithfully followed.” Titled with state names/i&/>0.', Utah!, etc.the novels' covers warn that “marauding Indian bands are spreading murder and mayhem among terror-stricken settlers.”7 In the Hollywood Old West, wagon trains are invariably encircled by savage Indian hordes. In the real West, among 250,000 whites and blacks who journeyed across the Plains between 1840 and 1860, only 362 pioneers (and 426 Native Americans) died in all the recorded battles between rhe two groups, Much more commonly, Indians gave

the new settlers directions, showed them water holes, sold them food and horses, bought cloth and guns, and served as guides and interpreters.68 These activities are rarely depicted in movies, novels, or our textbooks. Inhaling the misinformation of the popular culture, students have no idea lhat Natives considered European warfare far more savage than their own.

New England's first Indian war, the Pequot War of 1636-37, provides a case study of the intensified warfare Europeans brought to America. Allied with the Narragansetts, traditional enemies of the Pequots, the colonists attacked at dawn. Surrounding the Pequot village, whose inhabitants were mostly women, children, and old men, the British set it on fire and shot those who tried to escape the flames. William Bradford described the scene: “It was a fearful sight to see them thus frying in the fire and the streams of blood quenching the same, and horrible was the stink and scent thereof; but the victory seemed a sweet sacrifice, and they gave praise thereof to God, who had wrought so wonderfully for them.” The slaughter shocked the Narragansetts, who had wanted merely to subjugate the Pequots, not exterminate them. The Narragansetts reproached the English for their style of warfare, crying, “It is naught, it is naught, because it is too furious, and slays too many men.” In turn, Capt. John Underbill scoffed, saying that the Narragansett style of fighting was “more for pastime, than 10 conquer and subdue enemies.” Underbill's analysis of the role of warfare in Narragansett society was correct, and might accurately be applied to other tribes as well. Through the centuries, whites frequently accused their Native allies of not fighting hard enough. The Puritans tried to erase the Pequots even from memory, passing a law making it a crime to say the word Pequot. Bradford concluded proudly, “The rest are scattered, and the Indians in all quarters are so terrified that they are afraid to give them sanctuary.”70 None of these quotations enters our textbooks, which devote an average of A sentences to this war.

Perhaps the most violent Indian war began in 1676, when white New Englanders executed three Wampanoag Indians and the Wampanoags attackedKing Philip's War. One reason for the end of peace was that the fur trade, which had linked Natives and Europeans economically, was winding down in Massachusetts.11 Textbooks could present students with the Native side of this conflict by quoting the Wampanoag leader

Metacomet, whom the English called King Philip:

The English who first came to this country were but a handful of people, forlorn, poor, and distressed. My father was then sachem; he relieved their distresses in the most kind and hospitable manner. He gave them land to plant and build upon. They flourished and increased. By various means they got possessed of a great part of his territory. But he still remained their friend until he died. My elder brother became sachemhe was seized and confined and thereby thrown into illness and died. Soon after I became sachem they disarmed all my people. Their land was taken; but a small part of the dominion of my ancestors remains, I am determined not to live until T have no country.

This was no minor war. “Of some 90 Puritan towns, 52 had been attacked and 12 destroyed. . . . At the end of the war several thousand English and perhaps twice as many Indians lay dead.”7i King Philip's War cost more American lives in combat, Anglo and Native, in absolute terms than the French and Indian War, the Revolution, the War of 1812, the Mexican War, or the SpanishAmerican War. In proportion to population, casualties were greater than in any other American war.' Nonetheless, five of the twelve books T surveyed leave it out entirely. Most others give it halfa paragraph.

War with the Indians started in Acoma, now New Mexico, in 1599, when a Spanish leader avenged the death of his brother by “enslaving most of the villagers and chopping off one foot of all males over 25 years of age.”15 It spread to the Southeast where, “because of fierce and implacable Indian resistance, the Spanish were unable to colonize Florida for over a hundred years.”76 Except foe Most textbook maps, like that above, show “French territory,” “British territory,” 'Spanish Territory,“ and sometimes ”Disputed Territory." with no mention of Indians at all. In maps that include Indian nations, such as the map opposite from D, W. Meinig, The Shaping of America [(New Haven: Yale University Press. 19861, 1: 209], the function of Indians as buffers between the colonial powers is graphically evident.

a few minor skirmishes, it ceased in 1890 with the massacre at Wounded Knee. Our histories can hardly describe each war, because there were so many. But precisely because there were so many, the way our textbooks minimize the Indian wars misrepresents our history.

The textbooks also reduce the Indianness of some of our

other wars, From 1600 to 1754 Europe was often at war, including three world warsthe War of the League of Augsburg (1689-97), known in the United States as King William's War; the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-13), known here as Queen Anne's War; and the War of the Austrian Succession (1744-48), known here as King George's War. In North America the major European powers, England, France, and Spain, buffered from each other by Indian land, fought mainly through their Indian allies. Native Americans inadvertently provided a gift of relative peace to the colonies by absorbing the shock of combat themselves.

Another world war, the Seven Years War (1754-63), in the United States called the French and Indian War, was also fought in North America mostly by Native Americans on both sides. Native Americans not only fought in the American Revolution but were its first cause, for the Proclamation of 1763, which placated Native American nations by forbidding the colonies from making land grants beyond the Appalachian continental divide, enraged many colonists. They saw themselves as paying to support a British army that only obstructed them from seizing Indian lands on the western frontier. After hostilities with Britain broke out, however, the fledgling United Colonies in 1775 were initially more concerned about relations with Indian nations than with Europe, so they sent Benjamin Franklin first to the Iroquois, then to France. Native Americans also played a large role in the War of 1812 and participated as well in the Mexican War and the Civil War.TM In each war Natives fought mostly against other Natives. In each, the larger number aligned against the colonies, later the United States, correctly perceiving that, for geopolitical reasons, opponents of the United States offered them better chances of being accorded human rights and retaining their land.

Even in describing the French and Indian War, textbooks leave out the Indians! One of the worst defeats Indians ever inflicted on white forces was Ihe rout of General Eraddock in 1755 in Pennsylvania. Braddock had 1,460 men, including eight Indian scouts and a detachment of Virginia militia under George Washington. Six hundred to one thousand Native Americans and 290 French soldiers opposed them, but you would never guess any Indians were there from The American Tradition:

On July 9, as they were approaching the fort, the French launched an ambush. Braddock's force was surrounded and

defeated. The red-coated British soldiers, unaccustomed to fighting in the wilderness [s'c], suffered over 900 casualties. Braddock, mortally wounded, murmured as he died, “We shall know better how to deal with them another time.”

Tradition thus renders Braddock's last words meaningless, for “them” refers not to the French but to Native Americans.

This is one of many old lithographs that show Indians attacking BraddocK, evidence that colonials were aware who defeated Braddock, Today's textbooks make the Native Americans invisible.

In our Revolution, most of the Iroquois Confederacy sided with the British and attacked white Americans in New York and northern Pennsylvania. In 1778 the United States suffered a major defeat when several hundred Tories and Senecas routed 400 militia and regulars at Forty Fort, Pennsylvania, killing 340. After the Revolution, although Britain surrendered, its Native American allies did not. Our insistence on treating the Indians as ifwe had defeated them led to the Ohio War of 1790-95, and later to the War of 1812.

The never-ending source of dispute was land. To explain this constant conflict, half of the textbooks I examined rely on the cliche that Native Americans held some premodern understanding of land ownership. When students are informed that the Dutch bought Manhattan for $24 worth of trade goods, presumably they are meant to smile indulgently. What a bargain! What foolish Indians, not to recognize the potential of the island! Not one book points out that the Dutch paid the wrung tribe for Manhattan, Doubtless the Canarsees, native to Brooklyn, were quite pleased with the deal. The Weckquaesgeeks, who lived on Manhattan and really owned the land, weren't so happy. For years afterward they warred sporadically with the Dutch.TM Europeans were forever paying the wrong tribe or paying a small faction within a much larger nation. Often they didn't really care; they merely sought justification for theft. Such fraudulent transactions might even have worked in their favor, for they frequently set one tribe or faction against another. The biggest single purchase from the wrong tribe took place in 1803. All the textbooks tell how Jefferson “doubled the size of the United States by buying Louisiana from France.” Not one points out that it was not France's land to s e llit was Indian land. The French never consulted with the Native owners befote selling; most Native Americans never even

knew of the sale. Indeed, France did not really sell Louisiana for $15,000,000. France merely sold its claim to the territory. The United States was still paying Native American tribes for Louisiana throughout the nineteenth century. We were also fighting them for it: the Army A/rnanac lists more than fifty Indian wars in the Louisiana Purchase from 1819 to 1890. To treat France as the seller, as all our textbooks do, is Eurocentric. Equally Eurocentric are the maps textbooks use to show the Lewis and Clark expedition. They make Native Americans invisible, implying that the United States bought vacant land from the French, A lthough the M andans hosted the expedition during the winter of 1804-05 and the Clatsops did so the next winter, even these ttibes drop out. Apparently Lewis and Clark did it all on their own.

Some textbooks chide Natives for not understanding that when they sold their land, they transferred not only the agricultural rights, but also the rights to the property's game, fish, and sheer enjoyment. “Indians regarded the land in the same way we regard the sea,” to quote Ldnd ofPromise. Textbook authors seem unaware that most land sales before the twentieth century, including sales among whites, transferred primarily the rights to farm, mine, and otherwise develop the land. Undeveloped private land was considered public and accessible to all, within limits of good conduct. Moreover, tribal negotiators typically made sure that deeds and treaties specifically reserved hunting, fishing, gathering, and traveling rights to Native Americans.

Six of the twelve histories I studied avoid this cliche of Indian naivete about land ownership. Showing the influence of the new scholarship in Indian history, several of them even point out that the problem lay in whites' not abiding by accepted concepts of land ownership. But the textbook authors never develop this isolated admission into a general understanding of Indian wars. The most important cause of the War of 1812, for example, was land Spanish land (Florida), British land (Canada), but most of all Indian land. All along the boundary, from Vermont to the Georgia Piedmont, white Americans wanted to “push the boundaries of white settlement ever farther into the Indian country.” The British, on the other hand, wanted to “keep a sort of Indian buffer state between the United States and Canada.”81 Only three textbooks inquire reasonably into the causes of this war.sz The others simply repeat the pretext offered by the Madison administrationBritain's refusal to show proper

respect to American ships and seameneven though it makes no sense. After all, Britain's maritime laws had been in place since 1807 and caused no war until the frontier states sent War Hawks-senators and representatives who promised military action to expand the boundaries of the United Statesto Congress in 1810. After going on for two pages about the alleged maritime reasons for the war, The American Tradition admits its puzzlement: “The West and the South, oddly enough, were the most anti-British regions of the nation even though they were the least affected by Britain's policies toward American shipping,” Land ofPromise is similarly perplexed: “Where, you must wonder, were the War Hawks of New England? After all, it was New England ships and sailors who bore the brunt of [Britain's] attacks.”

Like its predecessors, the War of 1812 cannot be understood so long as its Indian origin is obscured. Whites along the frontier wanted the war, and along the frontier most of the war was fought, beginning in November 1811 with William Henry Harrison's attack on the Shawnecs and allied tribes in Indiana, called the Battle of Tippecanoe. The United States fought five of the seven major land battles of the War of 1812 primarily against Native Americans,

Nonetheless, unlike Canadian histories, none of our textbooks recognizes the involvement of Native Americans.

All but two textbooks miss the key result of the war. Some authors actually cite the “Star Spangled Banner” as the main outcome! Others claim that the war left “a feeling of pride as a nation” or “helped Americans to win European respect.” The American Adventure excels, pointing out, “The American Indians were the only real losers in the war.” Triumph ofthe American Nation expresses the same sentiments, but euphemistically: “After 1815 the American people began the exciting task of occupying the western lands.” The other ten books simply ignore the key outcome: in return for our leaving Canada alone, Great Britain gave up its alliances with Indian nations in what would become the United States.

Without war materiel and other aid from European allies, future Indian wars were transformed from major international conflicts to domestic moppingup operations. This result was central to the course of Indian-US, relations for the remainder of the century. Thus Indian wars after 1815, while they cost thousands of lives on both sides, would never again amount to a serious threat to the United States,84 Although Native Americans won many battles in

subsequent wars, there was never the slightest doubt over who would win in the end.

Another result of the War of 1812 was the loss of part of our history. “A century of learning [from Native Americans] was corning to a close. A century and more of forgettingof calling history into service to rationalize conquestwas beginning.” After 1815 Indians could no longer play what sociologists call the role of conflict partneran important other who must be taken into accountso Americans forgot that Indians had ever been significant in our history. Even terminology changed: until 1815 the word Americans had generally been used to refer to Native Americans; after 1815 it meant European Americans.

Ironically, several textbooks that omit King Philip's War and the Native American role in the War of 1812 focus instead on such minor Plains wars as Cetonimo's Apache War of 188586, which involved maybe forty Apache fighters.87 The Plains wars fit the post-1815 story line of the textbooks, since they pitted white settlers against serni-nomadic Indians. The Plains Indians are the Native Americans textbooks love to mourn: authors can lament their passing while considering it inevitable, hence untroubling.

The textbooks also fail to mention how the continuous Indian wars have reverberated through our culture. Carleton Seals has written that “our acquiescence in Indian dispossession has molded the American character.”89 As soon as Natives were no longer conflict partners, their image deteriorated in the minds of many whites. Karen Kupperman has shown how this process unfolded in Virginia after the Indian defeat in the 1640s: “It was the ultimate powerlessness of the Indians, not their racial inferiority, which made it possible to see them as people without rights.”85 Natives who had been “ingenious,” “industrious,” and “quick of apprehension” in 1610 now became “sloathfull and idle, vitious, melancholy, [and] slovenly.” This is another example of the process of cognitive dissonance. Like Christopher Columbus, George Washington changed his attitudes toward Indians. Washington held positive views of Native Americans early in his life, but after unleashing the Ohio War in 1790 he would come to denounce the Ohio Indians as “having nothing human except the shape.”

This process of rationalization became unofficial national policy after the War of 1812. In 1845 William Gilmore Simms wrote, “Our blinding prejudices . . . have been fostered as

necessary to justiiy the reckless and unsparing hand with which we have smitten [the Indians] in their habitations and expelled them from their country," In 1871 Francis A. Walker, Commissioner ofIndian Affairs, considered Indians beneath morality: "When dealing with savage men, as with savage beasrs, no question of national honor can arise." Whatever action the United States cared to take "is solely a question of expediency."91 Thus cognitive dissonance destroyed our national idealism. From 1815 on, instead of spreading democracy, we exported the ideology of white supremacy. Gradually we sought American hegemony over Mexico, the Philippines, much ofthe Caribbean basin, and, indirectly, over other nations. Although European nations professed to be shocked by our actions on the western frontier, before long they were emulating us. Britain exterminated the Tasmanian aborigines; Germany pursued total war against the Herrero of Namibia. Most western nations have to face this history. We also have to admit that Adolf Hitler displayed more knowledge of how we treated Native Americans than American high schoolers who rely on their textbooks. Hitler admired our concentration camps for Indians in the west "and often praised to his inner circle the efficiency of America's exterminationby starvation and uneven combat" as the model for his extermination of Jews and Gypsies.

Were there alternatives to this history of war? Of course, there were. Indeed, France, Russia, and Spain all pursued different alternatives in the Americas. Since the alternatives to war remain roads largely not taken in the United States, however, they are tricky topics for historians. As Edward Carr noted, "History is, by and large, a record of what people did, not of what they failed to do."9i On the other hand, making the present seem inevitable robs history of all its life and much of its meaning. History is contingent upon the actions of people. "The duty of the historian," Gordon Craig has reminded us, "is to restore to the past the options it once had." Craig also pointed out that this is an appropriate way to teach history and to make it memorable.94 White Americans chose among real alternatives and were often divided among themselves. At various points in our history, our anti-Indian policies might have gone another way. For example, one reason the War of 1812 was so unpopular in New England was that New Englanders saw it as a naked attempt by slaveowners to appropriate Indian land. Peaceful

coexistence of whites and Native Americans presents itself as perhaps the most obvious alternative to war, but was it really possible? In thinking about this question, we must take care not to compare a static Indian culture to changing modern culture. We have seen the rapid changes in independent Native culturesadaptation to an economy based on hunting and trapping, the flowering of multilingualism, development of more formal hierarchies. Such changes would no doubt have continued. Thus we are not talking about bow-and-arrow hunters living side by side with computerized urbanites.

We should keep in mind that the thousands of white and black Americans who joined Indian societies must have believed that coexistence was possible. Fromthe stari, however, white conduct hindered peaceful coexistence. A thousand little encroachments eventually made it impossible for Indians to farm near whiles. Around Plymouth, the Indians leased their grazing land but retained iheir planting grounds. Too late they found that this did not keep colonists from leiting theit livestock roam free to ruin the crops. When Native Americans protested, they usually found that colonial courts excluded their testimony. On the other hand, “the Indian who dared to kill an Englishman's marauding animals was promptly hauled into a hostile court.”" The precedent established on the Atlantic coastthat Indians were not citizens of the Europeans' state and lacked legal rightsprevented peaceful white-Indian coexistence throughout the colonies and later the United States. Even in Indian Territory, supposedly under Native control, whether Indians were charged with offenses on white land or whites on Indian land, [rial had to be held in a white court in Missouri,

miles away.96 Since many whites had a material interest in dispossessing Indians of their land, and since European and African populations grew ever larger while plagues continued to reduce the Indian population, plainly the United States was going to rule. In this sense war only prolonged the inevitable. Another alternative to war would have been an express commitment to racial harmony: a predominantly European but nonracist United States that did not differentiate between Indians and non-Indians. U.S. history provides several examples ofrelatively nonracist enclaves. Sociologists call them triracial isolates because their heritage is white, black, and red, as it were. For centuries, these

communities occupied swamps and other undesirable lands, wanting mostly to be left alone. The Revolutionary War hero Crispus Attucks was a member of such an enclave: an escaped slave of Wampanoag, European, and African ancestry. The Lumbee Indians in North Carolina comprise the largest such group. Other triracial isolates include the Wampanoags in Massachusetts, the Seminoles in Florida, and smaller bands from Louisiana to Maine.

The first British settlement in North America, Roanoke Island in 1585, probably did not die out but was absorbed into the nearby Croatoan Indians, “thereby achieving a harmonious biracial society that always eluded colonial planters.” Eventually the English and Croatoans may have become pan of the Lumbees. The British never learned/die outcome of the “Lost Colony,” however. Frederick Turner has suggested that they did not want to think about the possibility that British settlers had survived by merging with Native Americans. Instead, in the words of). F. Fausz, “tales of the 'Lost Colony' came to epitomize the treacherous nature of hostile Indians and served as the mythopoeic 'bloody shirt' for justifying aggressions against the Powhatan years later.” Triracial isolates have generally won only contempt from their whke neighbors, which is I why they have chosen rural isolation. Our textbooks isolate them, too: none I mentions the term or the peoples.

A related possibility for Natives, Europeans, and Africans was intermarriage. Alliance through marriage is a common way for two societies to deal! with each other, and Indians in the United States repeatedly suggested such a I policy.“ Spanish men married Native women in California and New Mexico I and converted them to Spanish ways. French fur traders married Native women I in Canada and Illinois and converted to Native ways. Not the British. Text books might usefully pass on to students the old clichethe French penetrated I Indian societies, the Spanish acculturatcd them, and the British expelledÈ them-for it offers a largely accurate summary of European-Indian relation ships. In New England and Virginia, English colonists quickly moved to] forbid interracial marriage.1 Pocahontas stands as the first and almost the last! Native to be accepted into British-American society, which we may therefore! call ”white society,“ through marriage. After her, most interracial couples found! greater acceptance in Native society. There their children often became chiefsj because their bicultural background was

an asset in the complex world th tribes now had to navigate. In Anglo society “half-breeds” were not valued but stigmatized. Another alternative to war was the creation of an Indian state within the United States. In 1778, when the Delaware Indians proposed that Native Americans be admitted to the union as a separate state, Congress refused even to consider the idea,11” In the 1840s Indian Territory sought the right enjoyed by other territories to send representatives to Congress, but white Southerners stopped them. The Confederacy won the backing of most Native Americans in Indian Territory, however, by promising to admit the territory as a state if the South won the Civil War. After the war Native Americans proposed the same arrangement to the United States. Again the United States said no, but eventually admitted Indian Territory as the white-dominated state oF Oklahomaironically, the name means “[land for] red people” in Choctaw.

Our textbooks pay no attention to any of these possibilities. Instead, they dwell on another road not taken: total one-way acculturation to white society. The overall story line in contemporary American history textbooks about American Indians is this: We tried to Europeanize them; they wouldn't or couldn't do it; so we dispossessed them. While more sympathetic than the account in earlier textbooks, this account falls into the trap of repeating as history the propaganda used by policymakers in the nineteenth century as a rationale for removal-that Native Americans stood in the way of progress. The only real difference is the tone. Back when white Americans were doing the dispossessing, justifications were shrill. They denounced Native cultures as primitive, savage, and nomadic. Often writers invoked the hand or blessings of God, said to favor those who “did more” with the land. Now that the dispossessing is done, our histories can see mure virtue in the conquered cultures. But they still picture Indians as tragically different, unable or unwilling to acculturate.

American ffistory tells of misguided liberals who tried to get Indians to settle down on farms and become “good Americans.” They wanted Indians to give up their customs and religions and copy the culture of the whites. They did not care that this would destroy the Indians as a distinct group of people. They believed that the change would be the best thing that could happen both to the Indians and to their white neighbors on the frontier.

American History appears to offer a sympathetic treatment of a tragic clash of two irreconcilable lifestyles in the Ohio Valley around 1800. This treatment mimics Pres. Thomas Jefferson, who told a delegation of Cherokees in 1808, “Let me entreat you therefore, on the lands now given [sic] you to begin every man a farm, let him enclose it, cultivate it, build a warm house on it, and when he dies let it belong to his wife and children after him.”106 Other textbooks share Jefferson's view and lament that if only the Indians had become farmers like us, everything would have turned out better. Triumph ofth? American Nation commiserates, “Two such different ways of life could not long exist peaceably side by side. Conflict was inevitable.”

The trouble is, it wasn't like that. The problem was not Native failure to acculturate. In reality, many European Americans did not really want Indians to acculturate. It wasn't in their interest. At times this was obvious, as when the Massachusetts legislature in 1789 passed a law prohibiting teaching Native Americans how to read and write “under penalty of death.”11“ The United States claimed to be willing to teach the Indians to farm, but Indians in Ohio already were farmers! American History fails to mention that the Cherokees were visiting Jefferson precisely to ask the president to assign their lands to them in severally [as individual farms] and to make them citizens.]efferson put them off. John Peterson has pointed out that a visitor catching sight of a Mississippi farm in 1820 would have had no way of knowing whether it was European or Choctaw until the farmers themselves came into view,109 The Choctaws didn't need to ”settle down.“ The American Way asks students, ”Why were the Indians moved further west?“ Its teachers' edition provides the answer: ”They were moved so the settlers could use the land for growing crops." We might add this catechism: What were the Indians doing on the land? They were growing crops! When Jefferson spoke to the Cherokees, whites had been burning Native houses and cornfields for 186 years, beginning in Virginia in 1622.

No matter how thoroughly Native Americans acculturated, they could not succeed in white society. Whites would not let them. “Indians were always regarded as aliens, and were rarely allowed to live within white society except on its periphery.”110 Native Americans who amassed property, owned Europeanstyle homes, perhaps operated sawmills, merely became the first targets of white thugs who

coveted their land and improvements. In time of war the position of assimilated Indians grew particularly desperate. Consider Pennsylvania. During the French and Indian War the Susquehannas, living peaceably in white towns; were hatcheted by their neighbors, who then collected bounties from authorise who weren't careful whose scalp they were paying for, so long as it was IndianJ Through the centuries and across the country, this pattern recurred. In 1860, fbtl When they stress Natives' alleged unwillingness to acculturate, American histories slip into the story line of the official seal of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. “Come Over and Help Us” is white settler propaganda, which grew into an archetype of wellmeaning Europeans and tragically different Indians.

instance, California ranchers killed 185 of the 800 Wiyots, a tribe allied with ihe whites, because they were angered by other tribes' cattle raids.'"

Occasionally textbooks acknowledge that most Native Americans were settled, but they do not let these settled Indians interfere with the traditional story line. Early on, American History admits that the Ohio Indians were farmers: “Unlike the tribes who lived by hunting, many of these Indians had taken up farming. For ihem, moving would mean more than having to find another hunting ground.” But forty pages later, when trying to rationalize the Indians' removal: “They tried to get Indians to settle down on farms and become 'good Americans.'” If the author of American History cannot remember from one chapter to the next that the Indians didn't need to settle down, we can hardly expect his readers to. The story line is too powerful an archetype. Most of the textbooks I studied describe the acculturation achieved by the Indians of the Southeast, the A Census taken among trie Cherokee in Georgia in 1825 (reported in Vogel, ed.. This Country Was Ours, 289) showed that they owned “33 grist mills, 13 saw mills. I powder mill, 69 blacksmith shops, 2 tan yards, 762 looms, 2,486 spinning wheels, 172 wagons, 2,923 plows, 7,683 horses, 22,531 black cattle, 46,732 swine, and 2,566 sheep.” Some Cherokees were wealthy planters, including Joseph Vann, who in 1835 cultivated 300 acres, operated a ferry, steamboat, mill, and tavern, and owned this mansion. It aroused the envy of the sheriff and other whites in Murray County, wtio evicted Vann in 1834 and appropriated the house for themselves, according to Lela Latch Lloyd.

“Five Civilized Tribes,” and point out that the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Creek, and Seminole nations were exiled to Oklahoma anyway. Nonetheless, . our culture and our textbooks still stereotype Native Americans as roaming primitive hunting folk, unfortunate victims of progress. Ironically, to Native eyes, Europeans were nomads. As Chief Seattle put it in 1855, “To us the ashes of our ancestors are sacred and their resting place is , hallowed ground. You wander far from the graves of your ancestors and seem-. ingly without regret.” In contrast, Indian “roaming” consisted mainly of moving from summer homes to winter homes and back again.

One way to understand why acculturation couldn't work for most Natives is to imagine that the United States allowed lawless discrimination against all people whose last name starts with the letter L. How long would we last? The first non-L people who wanted our homes or jobs could force us out, arid we would be without resources. People around us would then blame us L people for being vagrants. That is what happened to Native Americans, In Massachusetts, colonists were constantly tempted to pick quarrels with Indian families because the result was likely to be acquiring their land. In Oregon, 240 years later,

the process continued. Ten thousand whites had moved onto the Nez Perce reservation by 1862, so a senator from Oregon suggested that the United States should remove the nation. Sen. William Fessenden of Maine pointed out the problem.“There is no difficulty, I take it, in Oregon in keeping men off the lands that are owned by white men. But when the possessor happens to be an Indian, the question is changed altogether.”114 Without legal rights, acculturation cannot succeed. Inmuttooyahlatlat, known to whites as ChiefJoseph, said this eloquently: "We ask that the same law shall work alike on all men. If an Indian breaks the law, punish him by the law If a white man breaks the law, punish him also. Let me be a free manfree to travel, free to stop, free to work, free to trade where I choose, free to talk and think and act for myself.“”5 It was not to be. Most courts simply refused to heat testimony from Native Americans against whites. After noting how non-Indians could rise through the ranks of Native societies, Peier Farb summed up the possibilities in white society; “At almost no time in the history of the United States, though, were the Indians afforded similar opportunities for voluntary assimilation.”"

The acculturated Indian simply stood out as a target.

Theauthorsofhistorytextbooksoccasionallyannouncetheirintentionsin writing. In the teachers' edition of The American Way, for instance, Nancy Bauer states: “It is (he goal of this book that its readers will understand America, be proud of its strengths, be pleased in its determination to improve, arid welcome the opportunity to join as active citizens in The American Wsy” That the author could noi possibly pay reasonable attention to Indian history follows logically.

It is understandable that textbook authors might write history in such a way that studc'ins can feel good about themselves by feeling good about the p.ist. Feeling good is a human need, but it imposes a burden that history cannot bear without becoming simple-minded. Casting Indian history as a tragedy because Native Americans could not or would not acculturate is feel-good history for whites. By downplaying Indian wars, textbooks help us forget that we wrested the comment from Native Americans. Today's college students, when asked to compile a list of U.S. wars, never think to include Indian wars, individually or as a whole. The Indian-white wars that dominated our history from 1622 to 1815 and were of considerable importance until 1890 have disappeared from our national memory, The answer to minimizing the Indian wars is not maximizing them.

Telling Indian history as a parade of white villains might be feel-good history for those who want to wallow in the inference that America or whites are bad. What happened is more complex than that, however, so the history we tell must be more complex. Textbooks are beginning to reveal some of the division among whites that lent considerable vitality to the alternatives to war. Seven of the textbooks tell of Roger Williams of Salem, who in the 1630s challenged Massachusetts to renounce its royal patent to the land, asserting, “The natives are the true owners of it,” unless they sold it. (The Puritans renounced Williams, and he fled to Rhode Island.)"7 Five textbooks mention Helen Hunt Jackson,

who in 1881 paid to provide copies of her famous indictment of our Native American policies, A Century ofDishonor, to every member of Congress,11 Eight of the textbooks tell how Andrew Jackson and John Marshall waged a titanic struggle over Georgia's attempt to subjugate the Cherokees. Chief Justice Matshall found for the Cherokees, whereupon President Jackson ignored the court, reputedly

with the words, “John Marshall has made his decision; now let him enforce it!” But no textbook brings any suspense to the issue as one of the dominant questions throughout our first century as a nation. None tells how several Christian denominationsQuakers, Shakers, Moravians, some Presbyterians and a faction of the Whig Party mobilized public opinion on behalf of fair play for the Native Americans. By ignoring the Whigs, textbooks make the Cherokee removal seem inevitable, another example of unacculturated aborigines helpless in the way of progress. Native Americans would have textbooks note that, despite all the wars,

the plagues, the pressures against their cultures, Indians still survive, physically and culturally, and still have govemment-to-government relations with the United States. As recently as 1984, a survey of American history textbooks complained that “contemporary issues important to Native peoples were entirely j excluded.”130 The books I examined were somewhat better. The American Indian Movement spurred three major Indian takeovers in the early 1970s:

Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay, the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C., and Wounded Knee, South Dakota. Nine of the twelve textbooks mention at least one of these incidents; The American Tradition and Triumph offal American Nation competently explain the causes and results of all three. Seven of the twelve texrt facing Native fi and Triumph of. American History Anti-lndi cally, the very t successfully, all Poverty and di: get good jobs, have, and comi to maintain th Only one text cans: can disti this issue in : through the %

raise this issu< Indian interpr sition to civili call the ethni books show their way of way of life; unchanged a immigration. autonomy w ship into “pi ”remain Ind jacket. We r ; We j< Constitutioi ditional wa land are se transportati “Indian” in Impt sides of 01 have shape . societ the twelve textbooks make a reasonable attempt to cover the principal issues facing Native Americans in the twentieth century. Discovering American History and Triumph of the American Nation do a good job. Life and Liberty and Discovering American History offer maps showing Native American lands today.

Anti-Indian racism has eased considerably in the twentieth century. Ironically, the very fact that the United States is beginning to let Natives acculturate successfully,

albeit on Anglo terms, poses a new threat to Native coexistence. Poverty and discrimination helped isolate Indians, If Native Americans can now get good jobs, as some can, buy new vehicles and satellite televisions, as some have, and commute to the city for part of their life, as some do, it is much harder to maintain the intangible values that make up the core of Indian cultures. Only one textbook raises perhaps the key question now facing Native Americans: can distinctively Indian cultures survive? DiscoveringAmerican History treats this issue in an exemplary way, inviting students to experience the dilemma through the words of Native American teenagers. The other textbooks cannot raise this issue because they remain locked into non-Indian sources and a nonIndian interpretive framework. Textbooks still define Native Americans in opposition to civilization and still conceive of Indian cultures in what anthropologists call the ethnographic presentfrozen at the time of white contact. When textbooks show sympathy for "the tragic struggle of American Indians to maintain their way of life," they exemplify this myopia. Native Americans never had "a" way of life; they had many, Indians would not have maintained those ways unchanged over the last five hundred years, even without European and African immigration. Indians have long struggled to change their ways of life. That autonomy we took from them. Even today we divide Native American leadership into "progressives" who want to acculturate and "traditionals" who want to "remain Indian." Textbook authors do not put other Americans into this straitjacket. We non-Indians choose what we want from the past or from other cultures. We jettisoned our medical practices of the 1780s while retaining the Constitution, But Native American medical practitioners who abandon their traditional ways to embrace pasteurization from France and antibiotics from England are seen as compromising their Indianness. We can alter our modes of transportation or housing while remaining "American." Indians cannot and stay "Indian" in our eyes.

Improved histories might increase the chances for syncretism on both sides of our ideological frontier. If we knew the extent to which Indian ideas lave shaped American culture, the United States might recognize Native American societies as cultural assets from which we could continue to learn. At prePerhaps Native Americans can break through the dilemma of acculturation and become modern and Indian. Certainly their artists have accomplished this. Only since the

1930s have Inuit artists in Canada been carving soapstone, a material that in the previous century their ancestors used for making pots. This sculpture, “Dancing to My Spirit,” by Nalenik Temela. is a beautiful example of syncretism.

sent, none of our textbooks hints at this possibility; even the more enlightened ones merely champion better treatment for Indians and stop short of suggesting that our society might still benefit from Indian ideas.

Even if no Natives remained among us, however, it would still be important for us to understand the alternatives foregone, to remember the wars, and to learn the unvarnished truths about white-Indian relations, Indian history is the antidote 10 the pious ethnocentrism of American exceptionalism, the notion that European Americans are God's chosen people. Indian history reveals thai the United States and its predecessor British colonies have wrought great harm in the world. We must not forget this-not to wallow in our wrongdoing, but to understand and to learn, that we might not wreak harm again. We must temper our national pride with critical self-knowledge, suggests Christopher Vecsey: “The study of our contact with Indians, the envisioning of our dark American selves, can instill such a strengthening doubt.”I12 History through red eyes offers our children a deeper understanding than comes from encountering the past as a story of inevitable triumph by the good guys.

History, despite its wrenching pain, Cannot be unlived, and if faced With courage, need not be lived again.

The black-white rift stands at the very center of American history. It is the great challenge to which all our deepest aspirations to freedom must rise. If we forget thatif we forget the great stain of slavery that stands at the heart of our country, our history, our experimentwe forget who we are, and we make the great rift deeper and wider.

Ken Burns We have got to the place where we cannot use our experiences during and after the Civil War for the uplift and enlightenment of mankind,

IV. E. 6. Du Bois More Americans have learned the story Of the South during the years of the Civil War and Reconstruction from Margaret Mitchell's Gone with the Wind than from all of the learned volumes on this period.

Warren Beck and My/es dowers'

Maya Angelou

Lies My Teacher Told Me

5. “Gone with the Wind”: The Invisibility of Racism in…

When was the country we now know as the United States first settled? If we forget the lesson of the last chapter for the momentthat Native Americans settledthe best answer might be 1526. In the summer of that year,

five hundred Spaniards and one hundred black slaves founded a town neat the mouth of the Pee Dee River in present-day South Carolina. Disease and disputes with nearby Indians caused many deaths in the early months of the settlement. In November the slaves rebelled, killed some of their masters, and escaped to the Indians, By then only 150 Spaniards survived; they retreated to Haiti. The ex-slaves remained behind and probably merged with nearby Indian nations.

This is cocktail-party trivia, I suppose. American history textbooks cannot be faulted for not mentioning that the first non-Native settlers in the United States were black. Educationally, however, the incident has its uses. It shows that Africans (is it too early to call them African Americans?) rebelled against slavery from the first. It points to the important subject of three-way race relations Indian-African-Europeanwhich most textbooks completely omit. It teaches that slavery cannot readily survive without secure borders. And, symbolically, it illusttates that African Americans, and the attendant subject of black-white race relations, were part of American history from the first European attempts to settle.

Perhaps the most pervasive theme in our history is the domination of black America by white America. Race is the sharpest and deepest division in American life. Issues of black-white relations propelled the Whig Party to collapse, prompted the formation of the Republican Party, and caused the Democratic Party to label itself the “white man's party” for almost a century. The first time Congress ever overrode a presidential veto was for the 1866 Civil Rights Act, passed by Republicans over the wishes of Andrew Johnson. Senators mounted the longest filibuster in U.S. history, more than 534

hours, to oppose the 1964 Civil Rights bill. Thomas Byrne Edsall has shown how race prompted the sweeping political realignment of 1964-72, in which the white South went from a Democratic bastion to a Republican stronghold.6 Race still affects politics, as evidenced by the notorious Willie Horton commercial used by George Bush in the 1988 presidential campaign and the more recent candidacies of the Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke, Race riots continue to shake urban centers from Miami to Los Angeles.

Almost no genre of our popular culture goes untouched by race. From the 1850s through the 1930s, except during the Civil War and Reconstruction, minstrel shows, which derived in a perverse way from plantation slavery, were the dominant form of popular entertainment in America. During most of that period Uncle Tom's Cabin was our longest-running play, mounted in thousands of productions. America's first epic motion picture, Birth of a Nation; first talkie, The jazz Singer; and biggest blockbuster novel ever, Gone with the Wind, were substantially about race relations. The most popular radio show of all time was “Arnos 'n' Andy,” two white men posing as humorously incompetent African Americans.' The most popular television miniseries ever was “Roots,” which changed our culture by setting off an explosion of interest in genealogy and ethnic background. In music, race relations provide the underlying thematic material for many of our spirituals, blues numbers, reggae songs, and rap pieces.

The struggle over racial slavery may be the predominant theme in American history. Until the end of the nineteenth century, cottonplanted, cultivated, harvested, and ginned by slaveswas by far our most important export.8 Our graceful antebellum homes, in the North as well as in the South, were built largely by slaves or from profits derived from the slave and cotton trades. Blackwhite relations became the central issue in the Civil War, which killed almost as many Americans as died in all our other wars combined. Black-white relations was the principal focus of Reconstruction after the Civil War; America's failure . to allow African Americans equal rights led eventually to the struggle for civil I rights a century later.

The subject also pops up where we least suspect itat the Alamo,

throughout the Seminole Wars, even in the expulsion of the Mormons from Missouri.9 Studs Terkel is right: race is

our “American obsession.” Since those , o first Africans and Spaniards landed on the Carolina shore in 1526, our society I has repeatedly been torn apart and sometimes bound together by this issue of I black-white relations.

Over the years white America has told itself varying stories about the I enslavement of blacks. In each of the last two centuries America's most popular I novel was set in slaveryUncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe and Gwu I with the Wind by Margaret Mitchell. The two books tell very different stories; I Uncle Tom's Cabin presents slavery as an evil to be opposed, while Gone with the Wind suggests that slavery was an ideal social structure whose passing is to be lamented. Until the civil rights movement, American history textbooks in this century pretty much agreed with Mitchell. In 1959 my high school textbook presented slavery as not such a bad thing. If bondage was a burden for African Americans, well, slaves were a burden on Ole Massa and Ole Miss, too. Besides, slaves were reasonably happy and well fed. Such arguments constitute the “magnolia myth,” according to which slavery was a social structure of harmony and grace that did no real harm to anyone, white or black. A famous 1950 textbook by Samuel Eliot Morison and Henry Steele Commager actually said, “As for Sambo, whose wrongs moved the abolitionists to wrath and tears, there is some reason to believe that he suffered less than any other class in the South from its 'peculiar institution.'” “Peculiar institution” meant slavery, of course, and Morison and Commager here provided a picture of it that came straight from Cone with the Wind.

This is not what textbooks say today. Since the civil rights movement, textbooks have returned part of the way toward Stowe's devastating indictment of the institution. The discussion in American History begins with a passage that desctibes the living conditions of slaves in positive terms: “They were usually given adequate food, clothing, and shelter.” But the author immediately goes on to point out, “Slaves had absolutely no rights. It was not simply that they could not vote or own property. Their owners had complete control over their lives.” He concludes, “Slavery was almost literally inhuman.” American Adventures tells us, “Slavery led to despair, and despair sometimes led black people to take their own lives. Or in some cases it led them to revolt against white slaveholders.” Life and Liberty takes a flatter view: “Historians do not agree on how severely slaves were

treated"; the book goes on to note that whipping was common in some places, unheard of" on other plantations. Life and Liberty ends its section on slave life, however, by quoting the titles of spirituals"All My Trials, Lord, Soon Be Over"and by citing the inhumane details ofslave laws. No one could read any ofthese three books and think well ofslavery. Indeed, ten ofthe twelve books I studied portray slavery as intolerable to the slave.

Today's textbooks also show how slavery increasingly dominated our political life in the firsi half of the nineteenth century. They tell that the cotton gin made slavery more profitable," They tell how in the 1830s Southern states and the federal government pushed the Indians out of vast stretches of Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia, and slavery expandedAnd they tell that in the decades between 1830 and 1860, slavery's ideological demands grew shriller,

more overtly racist. No longer was ic enough for planters and slave traders to apologize for slavery as a necessary evil. Now slavery came to be seen "ofpositive value to the slaves themselves," in the words of Triumph of the American Nation. This ideological extremism was matched by harsher new laws and customs. "Talk of freeing the slaves became more and more dangerous in the South," in the words of The United SlatesA History of the Republic. Merely to receive literature advocating abolition became a felony in some slaveholding states. Southern states passed new ordinances interfering with the rights of masters to free their slaves. The legal position of already free African Americans became ever more precarious, even in the North, as white Southerners prevailed on the federal government to make it harder 10 restrict slavery anywhere in the nation.

Meanwhile, many Northern whites, as well as some who lived below the Mason-Dixon line, grew increasingly unhappy, disgusted that their nation had lost its idealism.15 The debate over slavery loomed ever larger, touching every subject. In 1848 Thomas Hart Benton, a senator from Missouri, likened the ubiquity of the issue to a biblical plague: "You could not look upon the table but there were frogs. You could not sit down at the banquet table but there were frogs. You could not go to the bridal couch and lift the sheets but there were frogs. We can see nothing, touch nothing, have no measures proposed, without having this pestilence thrust before us."

History textbooks now admit that slavery was the primary

cause of the Civil War. In the words of The United StatesA History of the Republic, “At the center of the conflict was slavery, the issue that would not go away,” Before the civil rights movement, many textbooks held that almost anything elsedifferences over tariffs and internal improvements, blundering politicians, the conflict between the agrarian South and the industrial Northcaused the war. This was a form of Southern apologetics.17 Among the twelve textbooks I reviewed, only] Triumph ofthe American Nation, a book that originated in the 1950s, still hold such a position.

Why do textbooks now handle slavery with depth and understanding? Before the 1960s publishers had been in thrall to the white South, In the 192C Florida and other Southern states passed laws requiring “Securing a Correct tory of the U.S., Including a True and Correct History of the Confederacy.”1 Textbooks were even required to call the Civil War “the War between States,” as if no single nation had existed which the South had rent apart. In ihc fifteen years between 1955 and 1970, however, the civil rights movement destroyed segregation as a formal system in America. The movement did not succeed in transforming American race relations, but it did help African AmeriJ cans win more power on the local level and prompted whites to abandon segregation. Today many school boards, curricular committees, and high school history departments include African Americans or white Americans who have cast off the ideology of white supremacy. Therefore contemporary textbooks can devote more space to the topic of slavery and can use that space to give a more accurate portrayal.

Americans seem perpetually startled at slavery. Children are shocked to learn that George Washington and Thomas Jefferson owned slaves. Interpreters at Colonial Williamsburg say that many visitors are surprised to learn that slavery existed therein the heart of plantation Virginia! Very few adults today realize that our society has been slave much longer than it has been free. Even fewer know that slavery was important in the North, too, until after the Revolutionary War. The first colony to legalize slavery was not Virginia but Massachusetts. In 1720, of New York City's population of seven thousand, 1,600 were African Americans, most of them slaves. Wall Street was the marketplace where owners could hire out their slaves by the day or week.

Most textbooks downplay slavery in the North, however, so slavery seems to be a sectional rather than national

problem. Indeed, even the expanded coverage of slavery comes across as an unfortunate bat minor blemish, compared to the overall story line of our textbooks. James Oliver Horton has pointed out that “the black experience cannot be fully illuminated without bringing a new perspective to the study of American history.”21 Textbook authors have failed to present any new petspective. Instead, they shoehorn their improved and more accurate pottrait of slavery into the old “progress as usual” story line. In this saga, the United States is always intrinsically and increasingly democratic, and slaveholding is merely a temporary aberration, not part of the big picture. Ironically, the very success of the civil rights movement allows authors to imply that the problem ofblack-white race relations has now been solved, at least formally. This enables textbooks lo discuss slavery without departing from their customarily optimistic tone.

While textbooks now show the horror of slavery and its impact on black Amenca, they remain largely silent regarding the impact of slavery on white America, North or South. Textbooks have trouble acknowledging that anything might be wrong with white Americans, or with the United States as a whole. Perhaps telling realistically what slavery was like for slaves is the easy pan. After all, slavery as an institution is dead. We have progressed beyond it, so we can acknowledge its evils. Even the Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond has mounted an exhibit on slavery that does not romanticize the institution.

Without explaining its relevance to the present, however, extensive coverage of slavery is like extensive coverage of the Hawley-Smoot Tariffjust more facts for hapless eleventh graders to memorize.

Slavery's twin legacies to the present are the social and economic inferiority it conferred upon blacks and the cultural racism it instilled in whites. Both continue to haunt our society. Thetefore, treating slavery's enduring legacy is necessarily controversial. Unlike slavery, racism is not over yet.

To function adequately in civic life in our troubled times, students must learn what causes racism. Although it is a complicated historical issue, racism in the Western world stems primarily from two related historical processes: taking land from and destroying indigenous peoples and enslaving Africans to work that land. To teach this relationship, textbooks would have to show students the dynamic

interplay between slavery as a socioeconomic system and racism as an idea system. Sociologists call these the social structure and the superstructure. Slavery existed in many societies and periods before and after the African slave trade. Made possible by Europe's advantages in military and social technology, the slavery started by Europeans in the fifteenth century was different, because it became the enslavement of one race by another. Increasingly, whites viewed the enslavement of whites as illegitimate, while the enslavement of Africans became acceptable. Unlike earlier slaveries, children of African American slaves would be slaves forever and could never achieve freedom through intermarriage with the owning class. The rationale for this differential treatment was racism. As Montesquieu, the French social philosopher who had such a profound influence on American democracy, ironically observed in 1748: “It is impossible For us to suppose these creatures to be men, because, allowing them to be men, a suspicion would follow that we ourselves are not Christian.”

Historians have chronicled the rise of racism in the West. Before the 1450s Europeans considered Africans exotic but not necessarily inferior. As more and more nations joined the slave trade, Europeans came to characterize Africans as stupid, backward, and uncivilized. Amnesia set in: Europe gradually found it convenient to forget that Moors from Africa had brought to Spain and Italy much of the learning that led to the Renaissance. Europeans had knov that Timbuctu, with its renowned university and library, was a center learning. Now, forgetting Timbuctu, Europe and European Americans perceiv Africa as the “dark continent.”21 By the 1850s many white Americans, includin some Northerners, claimed that black people were so hopelessly inferior thi slavery was a proper form of education for them; it also removed them phy cally from the alleged barbarism of the “dark continent.”

The superstructure of racism has long outlived the social structure of slavery that generated it. The following passage from Margaret Mitchell's Cone with ibe Wind, written in the 1930s, shows racism alive and well in that decade. The narrator is interpreting Reconstruction: “The former field hands found themselves suddenly elevated to the seats of the mighty. There they conducted themselves as creatures of small intelligence might naturally be expected to da Like monkeys or small children turned loose among treasured

objects whose value is beyond their comprehension, they ran wildeither from perverse pleasure in destruction or simply because of their ignorance."25 White supremacy permeates Mitchell's romantic bestseller. Yet in 1988, when the American Library Association asked library patrons to name the best book in the library, Gone with the Wine/won an actual majority against all other books ever published!'

The very essence of what we have inherited from slavery is the idea that it is appropriate, even "natural," for whites to be on top, blacks on the bottom. In its core our culture tells ustells all of us, including African Americansthat Europe's domination of the world came about because Europeans were smarter. In their cote, many whites and some people of color believe this. White supremacy is not only a residue of slavery, to be sure. Developments in American history since slavery ended have maintained it. Textbooks that do not discuss white involvement in slavery in the period before 1863, however, are not likely to analyze white racism as a factor in more recent years. Only five of the twelve textbooks books list racism, racial prejudice, or any term beginning with race in their indexes.27 Only two textbooks discuss what might have caused racism. The closest any of the textbooks comes to explaining the connection between slavery and racism is this single sentence from The American Tradition-. "In defense of their 'peculiar institution,' southerners became more and more determined to maintain their own way of life." Such a statement hardly suffices to show today's students the origin of racism in our society-it doesn't even use the word! The mean Adventure offers a longer treatment: "[African Americans] looked dif:rem from members of white ethnic groups. The color of their skin made assimilation difficult. For this reason they remained outsiders." Here Adventure as retreated from history to lay psychology. Unfortunately for its argument, skin color in itself docs not explain racism. Jane Elliot's famous experiments in M'S classrooms have shown that children can quickly develop discriminatory behavior and prejudiced beliefs based on eye color. Conversely, the leadership wsiiions that African Americans frequently reached among American Indian itions from Ecuador to the Arctic show that people do not automatically discriminate against others on [he basis of skin color.]

Events and processes in American history, from the time of slavery to the present, are what explain racism. Not one

textbook connects history and racism, however. Half-formed and uninformed notions rush in to fill the analytic vacuum textbooks thus leave. Adventure's three sentences imply that it is natural to exclude people whose skin color is different. White students may conclude that all societies are racist, perhaps by nature, so racism is all right. Black students may conclude that all whites are racist, perhaps by nature, so to be antiwhite is all right. The elementary thinking in Adventure's three sentences is all too apparent. Yet this is the most substantial treatment of the causes of racism among all twelve textbooks.

In omitting racism or treating it so poorly, history textbooks shirk a critical responsibility. Not all whites are or have been racist. Levels of racism have changed over time," If textbooks were to explain this, they would give students some perspective on what caused racism in the past, what perpetuates it today,

and how it might be reduced in the future. Although textbook authors no longer sugarcoat how slavery affected African Americans, they minimize white complicity in it. They present slavery virtually as uncaused, a tragedy, rather than a wrong perpetrated by some people on others. Textbooks maintain the fiction that planters did the work on the plantations. “There was always much work to be done,” according to Triumph of the American Nation, “for a cotton grower also raised most of the food eaten by his family and slaves.” Although managing a business worth hundreds of thousands of dollars was surely time-consuming, the truth as to who did most of the work on the plantation is surely captured more accurately by this quotation from a Mississippi planter lamenting his situation after the war: “I never did a day's work in my life, and don't know how to begin. You see me in these coarse old clothes; well, I never wore coarse clothes in my life before the war.”

The emotion generated by textbook descriptions of slavery is sadness, not] anger. For there's no one to be angry at. Somehow we ended up with four million slaves in America but no owners! This is part of a pattern in our textbookanything bad in American history happened anonymously. Everyone named il our history made a positive contribution (except John Brown, as the neX chapter shows). Or as Frances FitzGerald put it when she analyzed textbooks f 1979, “In all history, there is no known case of anyone's creating a problem for anyone else.“” Certainly the Founding

Fathers never created one. ”Popular moderaj depictions of Washington and Jefferson are utterly at variance with their lives as eighteenth-century slave-holding planters,“” Textbooks play their part by minimizing slavery in the lives of the founders. As with Woodrow Wilson, Helen Keller, and Christopher Columbus, authors cannot bear to reveal anything bad about our heroes. Nevertheless, almost half of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were slaveowners.

In real life the Founding Fathers and their wives wrestled with slavery. Textbooks canonize Patrick Henry for his “Give me liberty or give me death” speech. Not one tells us that eight months after delivering the speech he ordered “diligent patrols” to keep Virginia slaves from accepting the British offer of freedom to those who would join their side. Henry wrestled with the contradiction, exclaiming, “Would anyone believe I am the master ofslaves ofmy own purchase!”“ Almost no one would today, because only two of the twelve textbooks, Land of Promise and The American Adventure, even mention the inconsistency. Henry's understanding of the discrepancy between his words and his deeds never led him to act differently, to his slaves' sorrow. Throughout the Revolutionary period he added slaves to his holdings, and even at his death, unlike some other Virginia planters, he freed not a one. Nevertheless, Triumph of ike American Nation quotes Henry calling slavery ”as repugnant to humanity as it is inconsistent with the Bible and destructive of liberty," without ever mentioning that he held slaves. American Adventures devotes three whole pages to Henry, constructing a fictitious melodrama in which his father worries, “How would he ever earn a living?” Adventures then tells how Henry failed at storekeeping, “tried to make a living by raising tobacco,” “started another store,” “had three children as well as a wife to support,” “knew he had to make a living in mme way,” “so he decided to become a lawyer.” The student who reads this chapter and later learns that Henry grew wealthy from the work of scores of slaves has a right to feel hoodwinked.

Even more embarrassing is the case of Founding Father Thomas Jefferson. American history textbooks use several tactics to harmonize the contradiction between Jefferson's assertion that everyone has an equal right to "Life,

ttrty, and the pursuit of Happiness“ and his enslavement of 175 human leings at the time he wrote those words.

JefTerson's slaveholding affected almost everything he did, from his opposition to internal improvements to his eign policy. Nonetheless, half of our textbooks never note that Jefferson owned slaves. Life and Liberty offers a half-page minibiography of Jefferson, ivealing that he was ”shy,“ ”stammered,“ and ”always worked hard at what he Elsewhere Life contrasts Jefferson's political beliefs with Alexander milton's and supplies six paragraphs about “Jeffersonian Changes” of Federist policies, noting that Jefferson refused to wear a wig, repealed a whiskey tax, and walked rather than rode in his inaugural parade. Life dud Liberty says nothing about Jefferson and slavery, however. American History offers six different illustrations of the man for us to admire but makes no mention of his slaveholding. The Challenge of freedom mentions Jefferson on sixteen different pages but never in the context of slavery.

Even textbooks that admit that Jefferson owned slaves go out of their way to downplay the fact. The American Way buries his complicity with the institution in a paragraph about his opposition to the practice:

In his Notes on the State ofVirginia, published in 1787, Thomas Jefferson spoke out against owning slaves. Slavery, he said, made tyrants out of the masters and destroyed the spirit of the slaves, , . . Although Jefferson and others who owned slaves spoke against slavery, many people did not believe that a mixed society of equals could work.

“Jefferson and others who owned slaves” is ambiguous. Only the careful reade will infer that Jefferson was a slaveowner. Also ambiguous is Notes on the Slate of I Virginia, which contains lengthy arguments about why blacks and whites can I never participate in society equally. The attempt “will probably never end but i the extermination of the one or the other race,” Jefferson luridly concluded. Wt has mischaracterized the source.

The paragraph in American Adventures is more forthright:

The idea of slavery bothered Thomas Jefferson all his life. As an adult, he himself owned many slaves. He depended on their labor for raising tobacco on his plantation. Yet he understood that slavery was wrong, terribly wrong. It was the opposite of the thing he valued most in lifefreedom.

Again, the thrust of the treatment, the thing most likely to be remembered, j that Jefferson was an opponent of slavery, not a slaveowner.

Textbooks stress that Jefferson was a humane master,

privately tormen by slavery and opposed to its expansion, not the type to destroy families I selling slaves. In truth, by 1820 Jefferson had become an ardent advocate ofI expansion of slavery to the western territories. And he never let his ambivale about slavery affect his private life. Jefferson was an average master who had I slaves whipped and sold into the Deep South as examples, to induce other! to obey. By 1822, Jefferson owned 267 slaves. During his long life, of hund of different slaves he owned, he freed only three, and five more at his deathall blood relatives of his.

Another textbook tactic to minimize Jefferson's slaveholding is to admit it but emphasiz.e that others did no better, “Jefferson revealed himself as a man of his times,” states Land ofPromise. Well, what were those times? Certainly most white American1! in the 1770s were racist. Race relations were in flux, however, due to the Revolutionary War and to its underlying ideology about the rights of mankind thai Jefferson, among others, did so much to spread. Five thousand black soldiers fought alongside whites in the Continental Army, “with courage and skill,” nccording to Triumph of the American Nation. In reality, of course, some fought “with courage and skill,” like some white recruits, and some failed to fire their guns and ran off, like some white recruits.56 But because these men fought in integrated units for the most part and received equal pay, their existence in itselfhelped decrease white racism,5 Moreover, the American Revolution is one of those moments in our history when the power of ideas made a real difference, “In contending for the birthright of freedom,” said a captain in the army, “we have learned to feel for the bondage of others.”10 Abigail Adams wrote her husband in 1774 to ask how we could “fight ourselves for what we are daily robbing and plundering from those who have as good a right to freedom as we have,”41 The contradiction between his words and his slaveowning embarrassed Patrick Henry, who offered only ii lame excuse“I am drawn along by the general inconvenience of living here without them”;md admitted, “I will not, I cannot justify it.”4! Other options were available to planters. Some, including George Washington, valued consistency more than Henry or Jefferson and freed their slaves outright or at east in their wills. Other slaveowners freed their male slaves to fight in the ilonial army, collecting a bounty for each one who enlisted. In the first two lecades after the Revolution, the

number of free blacks in Virginia soared tenfold, from 2,000 in 1780 to 20,000 in 1800. Most Northern states did away with slavery altogether. Thus Thomas Jefferson lagged behind many whites of us nines in the actions he look wiih regard to slavery45 Manumission gradually flagged, however, because most of the white Southerners who, like Jefferson, kept their slaves, erew rich. Their neighbors 'I'OO rought well of them, as people often do of those richer than themselves. To a :e the ideology of the upper class became the ideology of the whole /, and as the Revolution receded, that ideology increasingly justified ry. Jefferson himself spent much of his slave-earned wealth on his mansion Vlomicello and on books that he later donated to the University of Virginia;

these expenditures became part of his hallowed patrimony, giving history yet another reason to remember him kindly,

Other views are possible, however. In 1829, three years after Jefferson's death, David Walker, a black Bostonian, warned members of his race that they should remember Jefferson as their greatest enemy. “Mr. Jefferson's remarks respecting us have sunk deep into the hearts of millions of whites, and never will be removed this side of eternity.” For the next hundred years, the open white supremacy of the Democratic Party, Jefferson's political legacy to the nation, would bear out the truth of Walker's warning.

Textbooks are in good company: the Jefferson Memorial, too, whitewashes its subject. On its marble walls a carved panel proclaims Jefferson's \ boast, “I have sworn eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the , mind of men,” without ever mentioning his participation in racial slavery. Per. haps asking a marble memorial to tell the truth is demanding too much. Should history textbooks similarly be a shrine, however? Should they encourage nuI dents to worship Jefferson? Or should they help students understand him, I wrestle with the problems he wrestled with, grasp his accomplishments, and I also acknowledge his failures?

The idealistic spark in our Revolution, which caused Patrick Henry suchI verbal discomfort, at first made the United States a proponent of democracy around the world. However, slavery and its concomitant ideas, which legitiJ mated hierarchy and dominance, sapped our Revolutionary idealism. Most ttttM books never hint at this clash of ideas, let alone at its impact on our fordgfl policy.

After the Revolution, many Americans expected our

example woulfl inspire other peoples. It did. Our young nation got its first chance to help in thfll 1790s, when Haiti revolted against France, Whether a president owned slavJ seems to have determined his policy toward the second independent nationiflj the hemisphere. George Washington did, so his administration loaned hundred! of thousands of dollars to the French planters in Haiti to help them suppreB their slaves. John Adams did not, and his administration gave considerable SUM port to the Haitians. Jefferson's presidency marked a general retreat fromtbM idealism of the Revolution. Like other slaveowners, Jefferson preferred fll Napoleonic colony to a black republic in the Caribbean. In 1801 he reversed U.S. policy toward Haiti and secretly gave France the go-ahead to reconquer tn island. In so doing, the United States not only betrayed its heritage, but also acted against its own self-interest. For if France had indeed been able lo retakd Haiti, Napoleon would have maintained his dream of an American empire. !

United States would have been hemmed in by France to its west, Britain to its north, and Spain to its south. But planters in the United States were scared by the Haitian Revolution. They thought it might inspire slave revolts here (which it did). When Haiti won despite our flip-flop, the United States would not even extend it diplomatic recognition, lest its ambassador inflame our slaves “by exhibiting in his own person an example of successful revolt,” in the words of a Geotgia senator.46 Five of the twelve textbooks mention how Haitian resistance led France to sell us its claim to Louisiana, but none tells ofour flip-flop. Indeed, no textbook ever makes any connection between slavery and US, foreign policy.

Racial slavery also affected our policy toward the next countries in the Americas to revolt, Spain's colonies. Haiti's example inspired them to seek independence, and the Haitian government gave Simon Bolivar direct aid. Our statesmen were ambivalent, eager to help boot a European power out of the hemisphete but worried by the racially mixed rebels doing the booting. Some planters warned our government to replace Spain as the colonial power, especially in Cuba. Jefferson suggested annexing Cuba. Fifty years later, diplomats in the Franklin Pierce administration signed the Ostend Manifesto, which proposed thai the United States buy or take the island from Spain. Slaveowners, still obsessed with Haiti as a role model, thus hoped to prevent Cuba's

becoming a second Haiti, with “flames [that might] extend to our own neighboring shores,”

in the words of the Manifesto.47 In short, slavery prompted the United States to have imperialist designs on Latin America rather than visions of democratic liberation fot ihe region.

Slavery affected our foreign policy in still other ways. The first requirement of a slave society is secure borders. We do not like to think of the United Slates as a police state, a nation like East Germany that people had to escape from, but the slaveholding states were just that. Indeed, after the Dred Scott decision in 1857, which declared “A Negro had no rights a white man was bound to respect,” thousands of free African Americans realized they could not be safe even in Northern states and fled to Canada, Mexico, and Haiti.48 Slaveholders dominated our foreign policy until the Civil War. They were always concerned about our Indian borders and made sure that treaties with Native nations stipued thai Indians surrender all African Americans and return any runaways.4 S. territorial expansion between 1787 and IS55 was due in large part avers' influence. The largest pressure group behind the War of IS12 was iveholdets who coveted Indian and Spanish land and wanted to drive Indian S farther away from the slaveholding states to prevent slave escapes. Even ugh Spain was our ally during that war, in the aftermath we took Florida from Spain because slaveholders demanded we do so. Indeed, Andrew Jackson attacked a Seminole fort in Florida in 1816 precisely because it harbored hundreds of runaway slaves, thus initiating the First Seminole War.'

The Seminoles did not exist as a tribe or nation before the arrival of Europeans and Africans. They were a triracial isolate composed of Creek Indians, remnants of smaller tribes, runaway slaves, and whites who preferred to live in Indian society. The word Seminolt is itself a corruption of the Spanish cinmrrou (corrupted to maroons on Jamaica), a word that came to mean “runaway slaves.”51 The Seminoles' refusal to surrender their African American members led to the First and Second Seminole Wars (1816-18, 1835-42). Whites attacked not because they wanted the Everglades, which had no economic value to the United States in the nineteenth century, but to eliminate a refuge for runaway slaves. The Second Seminole War was the longest and costliest war the United States ever fought against Indians,"

The college textbook America: P&i and Prtsent tells why we fought it, putting the war in the context of slave revolts:

The most sustained and successful effort of slaves to win their freedom by force of arms took place in Florida between 1835 and 1842 when hundreds of black fugitives fought in the Second Seminole War alongside the Indians who had given them a haven. The Seminoles were resisting removal to Oklahoma, but for the blacks who took part, the war was a struggle for their own freedom, and the treaty that ended it allowed most of them to accompany their Indian allies to the transMississippi West,

This is apparently too radical for high school: only six of the twelve textbook even mention the war. Of these, only four say that ex-slaves fought witih the Seminoles; not one tells that the ex-slaves were the real reason for the war.

Slavery was also perhaps the key factor in the Texas War (1835-36). Thl freedom for which Davy Crockett, James Bowie, and the rest fought at die Alamo was the freedom to own slaves! As soon as Anglos set up the Republic of Texas, its legislature ordered all free black people out of the Republic. The next major war, the Mexican War (1846-48), was again driven chiefly by Southern planters wanting to push the borders of the nearest free land farthsfl from the slave states. Probably the clearest index of how slavery affected USI foreign policy is provided by the Civil War, foe between 1861 and 1865 we had two foreign policies, the Union's and the Confederacy's, The Union lecog-j nized Haiti and shared considerable ideological compatibility with postrcvoluformal black suit, usually rumpled and always too short for his long arms and legs. Douglas was what we would call a flashy dresser. He wore shirts with rufiles, fancy embroidered vests, a broad fell hat. He had a rapid-fire way of speaking thai contrasted with Lincoln's slow, deliberate style Lincoln's voice was high pitched, Douglas's deep. Both had to have powerful lungs to make themselves heard over street noises and the bustle ofthe crowds. They had no public address systems to help them.

The author of The American Way concentrates in a similar fashion appearances and voices:

One member of the audience, Gustave Koerner, reported how each of the candidates looked and what effect each had on his audience:

“Douglas was fighting for his political life. No greater contrast could be imagined than the one between Lincoln and

Douglas. The latter was really a little giant physically . . . while Lincoln, when standing erect, towered to six feet four inches, Lincoln, awkward in D posture and leaning a little forward, stood calm . . . He addressed his hearers in a somewhat familiar yet very earnest way with a clear, distinct, and far-reaching voice, generally well controlled, but sometimes expressive of sadness, though at times he could assume a most humorous and even comical look.. ,." [ellipses in the textbook]

So we learn that Douglas was a flashy dresser and spoke powerfullybut' are his ideas? What did he say?

Although Way quotes nine sentences of this bystander's description, twelve textbooks combined give us just three sentence fragments from Doug himself. Here is every word of his they provide:

"forever divided into free and slave states, as our fathers made it," "thinks the Negro is his brother," and "for a day or an hour."

Just twenty-four words in twelve booksl While celebrating the "Little Gia his "powerful speech" or "splendid oratory," nine textbooks silence him pletely. Instead, the omnipresent authorial voice supplies his side of the "Douglas was for popular sovereignty." This summary from Lift and Libi shorter than most but otherwise representative. Of course, phrased this abstractly, who would oppose popular sovereignty?

Douglas's position was not so vague, however. The debate was largely about the morality of racially based slavery and the position African Americans should eventually hold in our society. That is why Paul Angle chose the title Created Equal? for his centennial edition of the debates.58 On July 9, 1858, in Chicago, Douglas made his position dear, as he did repeatedly throughout that summer:

In my opinion this government of ours is founded on the white basis. It was made by the white man, for the benefit of the white man, to be administered by white men. ..,

I am opposed to taking any step that recognizes the Negro man or the Indian as the equal of the while man, I am opposed to giving him a voice in [he administration of the government. I would extend to the Negro, and the Indian, and to all dependent races every right, every privilege, and every immunity consistent with the safety and welfare of the white races; but equality they never should have, either political or social, or in any other respect whatever.

My friends, you see that the issues are distinctly drawn.

Texibook readers cannot see that the issues are distinctly drawn, however, muse textbooks give them no access to Douglas's side. American History is the only texlbook that quotes Stephen Douglas on race: “Lincoln 'thinks the Negro is his brother,' the Little Giant sneered.” Why do textbooks censor Douglas? Since they devote paragraphs to his wardrobe, it cannot befor lack of space. To be sure, textbook authors rarely te anyone. But more particularly, the heroification process seems to be operiling again, Douglas's words might make us think badly of him. Compared to Douglas, Lincoln was an idealistic equalitarian, but in llithern Illinois, arguing with Douglas, he too expressed white supremacist ideas. us at the debate in Charleston he said, “I am not, nor ever have been in favor of ringing about the social and political equality of the white and black races | applause|that I ant not nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors groes,” Textbook authors protect us from a racist Lincoln. By so doing, they lish students' capacity to recognize racism as a force in American life. For if ttln could be racist, then so might the res! ofus be. And ifLincoln could trand racism, as he did on occasion, then so might the rest ofus.

During the Civil War, Northern Democrats countered the Republican charge that they favored rebellion by professing to be the “white man's party,” I They protested the government's emancipation of slaves in the District ofI Columbia and its diplomatic recognition of Haiti. They claimed Republicans had “nothing except 'nigger on the brain.'” They were enraged when the U.S.I army accepted African American recruits. And they made race a paramount! factor in their campaigns.

In those days before television, parties held coordinated rallies. On theI last Saturday before the election, Democratic senators might address crowds in each major city; local officeholders would hold forth in smaller towns. Each ofl these rallies featured music. Hundreds of thousands of songbooks were printed so the party faithful might sing the same songs coast to coast. A favorite of 1864 was sung to the tune of “Yankee Doodle Dandy”:

THE NEW NATIONAL ANTHEM “NIGGER DOODLE DANDY”

Yankee Doodle is no more, Sunk his name and station; Nigger Doodle takes bis place,

And favors amalgamation.

CHORUS: Nigger Doodle's all thego, Ebony shins and bandy,

“Loyal”people all must bow To Nigger Doodle dandy.

The white breed is under par ft lacks the rich a-romy,

Give us something black as tar, Give us “Old Dahomey.”

CHORUS: Nigger Doodle's al! the go, £7"c.

Blubber lips are killing sweet, And kinky heads are splendid;

And oh, it makes such bullyfeet To have the heels extended.

CHORUS: Nigger Doodle's all the go, Ot I have shared these lyrics with hundreds of college students and scores of high school history teachers. To get audiences to take the words seriously, I usually try to lead them in a singalong. Often even all-white groups refuse. They are shocked by what they read. Nothing in their high school history textbooks hinted that national politics was ever like this.

Partly because many party members and leaders did not identify with the war effort, when the Union won Democrats emerged as the minority party. Republicans controlled Reconstruction. Like slavery, Reconstruction is a subject on which textbooks have improved since the civil rights movement. The earliest accounts, written even before Reconstruction ended, portrayed Republican state governments struggling to govern fairly but confronted with immense problems, not the least being violent resistance from racist ex-Confederates. Textbooks written between about 1890 and the 1960s, however, painted an unappealing portrait of oppressive Republican rule in the postwar period, a picture that we might call the Confederate myth of Reconstruction. For years black families kep! the truth about Reconstruction alive. The aging slaves whose stories were recorded by WPA writers in the 1930s remained proud of“ blacks' roles during Reconstruction. Some still remembered the names of African Americans elected lo office sixty years earlier. ”I know folks think the books tell the truth,“ said an eighty-eight-year-old former slave, ”but they shore don't."60 As those who knew construction from personal experience died off, however, even in the black community the textbook view took over.

My most memorable encounter with the Confederate myth of Reconstruction came during a discussion with seventeen first-year students at Tougaloo -ollege, a

predominantly black school in Mississippi, one afternoon in January 970.1 was about to launch into a unit on Reconstruction, and I needed to find out what the students already knew. “What was Reconstruction?” I asked. “What nages come to your mind about that era?” The class consensus: Reconstruction was ihe time when African Americans took over the governing of the Southern S, including Mississippi. But they were too soon out of slavery, so they :d up and reigned corruptly, and whites had to take back control of the state governments. I sat stunned. So many major misconceptions glared from that statement was hard to know where to begin a rebuttal. African Americans never over the Southern states. All governors were white and almost all legisla, had white majorities throughout Reconstruction. African Americans did : Jniess up“; indeed, Mississippi enjoyed less corrupt government during econstmction than in the decades immediately afterward. ”Whites" did not take back control of the state governments; rather, some white Democrats used force and fraud to wrest control from biracial Republican coalitions.

For young African Americans to believe such a hurtful myth about their past seemed tragic. It invited them to doubt their own capability, since their race had “messed up” in its one appearance on American history's center stage. It also invited them to conclude that it is only right that whites be always in control. Yet my students had merely learned what their textbooks had taught them. Like almost all Americans who finished high school before the 1970s, they had encountered the Confederate myth of Reconstruction in their American history classes. I, too, learned it from my college history textbook. John F. Kennedy and his ghost writer retold it in their portrait of L. Q._C, Lamar in Profiles in Courage, which won the Pulitzer Prize.

Compared to the 1960s, today's textbooks have vastly improved theii treatments of Reconstruction. All but three of the twelve textbooks I surveys paint a very different picture of Reconstruction from Gone with ihe Wind.' No longer do histories claim that federal troops controlled Southern society decade or more. Now they point out that military rule ended by 1868 in all three states. No longer do they say that allowing African American men to vo set loose an orgy of looting and corruption. The 1961 edition of TriumphoU American Nation condemned Republican rule in the South: “Many of the 'c petbag' governments were inefficient,

wasteful, and corrupt." In stark conti the 1986 edition explains that "The southern reconstruction legislatures stafl many needed and long overdue public improvements , . . strengthened pub education . . . spread the tax burden more equitably . . . [and] introdu overdue reforms in local government and the judicial system."

Like their treatment of slavery, textbooks' new view of Reconstruc represents a sea change, past due, much closer to what the original sources I the period reveal, and much less dominated by white supremacy, Howeve: the way the textbooks structure their discussion, most of them inadvertently I take a white supremacist viewpoint. Their rhetoric makes African Ameri rather than whites the "problem" and assumes that the major issue of struction was how to integrate African Americans into the system, econotnif and politically. "Slavery was over," says The American Way. "But the South' ruined and the Blacks had to be brought into a working society," Blacks' already working, of course. One wonders what the author thinks they had j doing in slavery! Similarly, according to Triumph ofthe American Nation, 1 struction "meant solving the problem of bringing black Americans intQ mainstream of national life " Triumph supplies an instructive example myth oflazy, helpless black folk: "When white planters abandoned their plantations on islands off the coast of South Carolina, black people there were left helpless and destitute." In reality, these black people enlisted in Union armies, operated the plantations themselves, and made raids into the interior to free slaves on mainland plantations. The archetype of African Americans as dependent or others begins here, in textbook treatments of Reconstruction. It continues to ihc present, when many white Americans believe blacks work less than whiles, even though census data show they work more.

In reality, white violence, not black ignorance, was the key problem during Reconstruction. The figures are astounding. The victors of the Civil War executed but one Confederate officeholder, Henry Wirz, notorious commandant of Andersonville prison, while the losers murdered hundreds of officeholders and other Unionists, white and black,64 In Hinds County, Mississippi, alone, whites killed an average of one African American a day, many of them servicemen, during Confederate Reconstructionthe period from 1865 to 1867 when ex-Confederates ran the governments of most Southern states. In Louisiana in the summer and fall of 1868,

white Democrats killed 1,081 persons, mostly African Americans and white Republicans.5 In one judicial district in North Carolina, a Republican judge counted 700 beatings and 12 murders.

lustration of armed whites raiding a black neighborhood in Memphis, Tennessee, L866 riot, exemplifies white-black violence during and after Reconstruction. Forty .Mean Americans died in this riot; whites burner! down every black church in the city.

Although the narratives in textbooks have improved, some of the pictures havei Four of the twelve textbooks feature this cartoon, “The Solid South” represented i delicate white woman. She is weighed down by Grant and armaments stuffed I carpetbag, accompanied by bluecoated soldiers of occupation. Textbook autfiors I discuss this cartoon to encourage students to analyze its point of view. The Ami Way at least asks, “How do you interpret this cartoon?” The other three tex merely use the drawing to illustrate Reconstruction: "The South's heavy burden tions Triumph of the American Naiion.

Moreover, violence was only the most visible component of a broader pattern of white resistance to black progress.

Attacking education was an important element of the white supremacists' program. “The opposition to Negro education made itself felt everywhere in a combination not to allow the freedmen any room or building in which a school might be taught,” said Gen. O. O. Howard, head of the Freedmen's Bureau. “In 1865, 1866, and 1867 mobs of the baser classes at intervals and in all parts of the South occasionally burned school buildings and churches used as schools, flogged leachers or drove them away, and in a number of instances murdered them.”"

With the exception of The American Way and Discovering, American History, each of the twelve textbooks includes at least a paragraph on white violence during Reconstruction. Six of twelve textbooks tell how that violence, coupled with failure by the United States to implement civil rights laws, played a major role in ending Republican state governments in the South, thus ending Reconstruction. Hut, overall, textbook treatments of Reconstruction still miss the point: the problem of Reconstruction was integrating Conjvdfrates, not African Americans, into the new order. As soon as the federal government stopped addressing the problem of racist whites,

Reconstruction ended. Since textbooks find it hard to say anything really damaging about white people, their treatments of why Reconstruction failed lack clarity. Triumph presents the end of construction as a failure of African Americans: “Other northerners grew weary of the problems of black southerners and less willing to help them learn their new roles ;is citizens.” The American Adventure echoes: "Millions of ex-slaves could not be converted in ten years into literate voters, or successful politicians,

farmers, and businessmen.“ Because I too ”learned" that African Americans were the unsolved problem of Reconstruction, reading Gunnar Myrdal's An American Dilemma was an 'e-opening experience for me. Myrdal introduced his (944 book by describing the change in viewpoint he was forced to make as he conducted his research,

When the present investigator started his inquiry, the preconception was thai it had to be focused on the Negro people. . . . But as he proceeded in his studies into the Negro problem, it became increasingly evident that little, if anything, could be scientifically explained in terms of the peculiarities of the Negroes themselves. . . . The Negro problem is predominantly a white . .. problem.

This is precisely the change textbook authors still need to make. Their I failure to make it lies behind the appalling results of a 1976 national survey of first-yearcollegestudents,amajorityofwhomventuredthatReconstructionled I to “unparalleled corruption among the entrenched carpetbagger governors and I their allies in the black dominated legislatures of the defeated states”precisely I the Confederate myth of Reconstruction.70 Textbooks in 1976 no longer said I that. But they failed and still fail to counter this pervasive myth with an analysis I that has real power. As one student said to me, “You'll never believe all the stuff I learned in high school about Reconstructionlike, it wasn't so bad, it set up I school systems. Then I saw Gone wiih the Wind and learned the truth about I Reconstruction!” What is identified as the problem determines the frame of I rhetoric and solutions sought. Myrdal's insight, to focus on whites, is critical to I understanding Reconstruction.

Focusing on white racism is even more central to understanding thefl period Rayford Logan called “the nadir of American race relations”: the years I between 1890 and 1920, when African Americans were again put back into!

second-class citizenship. During this time white Americans, North and South, I joined hands to restrict black civil and economic rights. Perhaps because thcfl period was marked by such a discouraging increase in white racism, ten of thH twelve textbooks ignore the nadir. The finest coverage, in American History, sunn marizes the aftermath of Reconstruction in a section entitled “The Long Night j Begins.” “After the Compromise of 1877 the white citizens of the North lurnfl their backs on the black citizens of the South. Gradually the southern statfl broke their promise to treat blacks fairly. Step by step they deprived them ofthe right to vote and reduced them to the status of second-class citizens.” America History then spells out the techniquesrestrictions on voting, segregation in public places, and lynchingswhich southern whites used to maintain wbH supremacy.

Triumph ofthe American Nation, on the other hand, sums up in these bUflil words; “Reconstruction left many major problems unsolved and created newifl equally urgent problems. This was true even though many forces in the NolB and the South continued working to reconcile the two sections.” These sen tences are so vague as to be content-free. Frances FitzGerald used an earlierB sion of this passage to attack what she called the “problems” approach American history. “These 'problems' seem to crop up everywhere.” she deli panned. “History in these texts is a mass of problems.”“ Five hundred pifl later in Triumph, when the authors reach the civil rights movement, race rtfctions again becomes a ”problem." The authors make no connection between failure of the United States to guarantee black civil rights in 1877 and the need for a civil rights movement a century later. Nothing ever causes anything. Things just happen.

In fact, during Reconstruction and the nadir, a battle raged for the soul of the Southern white racist and in a way for that of the whole nation. There is a parallel in the reconstruction of Germany after World War II, a battle for the soul of the German people, a battle which Nazism lost (we hope). But in the Uniied Slates, as American History tells, racism won. Between 1890 and 1907 every Southern and border state “legally” disfranchised the vast majority of its African American voters. Lynchings rose to an all-time high, (n 1896 the Supreme Court upheld segregation in Plessy v. Ferguson. No textbook explains the rationale of segregation, which is crucial to understanding its devastating

effect on black and white psyches. Describing the 1954 Supreme Court decision that would begin to undo segregation, The American Way says, "No separate school could ttuly bv equal for Blacks," but offers no clue as to why this would be so.

Textbooks need to offer the sociological definition of segregation; a system of racial etiquette that keeps the oppressed group separate from the oppressor when both are doing equal tasks, like learning the multiplication tables, but allows intimate closeness when the tasks are hierarchical, like cooking or cleaning for while employers. The rationale of segregation thus implies that the oppressed art a pariah people. “Unclean!” was the caste message of every “colored” water fountain, waiting room, and courtroom Bible. “Inferior” was the implication of every school that excluded blacks (and often Mexicans, Native Americans, and “Orientals”). This ideology was born in slavery and remained alive to rationalizethe second-class citizenship imposed on African Americans after Reconstruction. This stigma is why separate could never mean equal, even when black facilities might be newer or physically superior. Elements of this stigma survive to harm the self-image of some African Americans today, which helps explain why Caribbean blacks who immigrate to the United States often outperform black Americans,

During the nadir, segregation increased everywhere. Jackie Robinson was iiii the first black player in major league baseball. Blacks had played in the major agues in the nineteenth century, but by 1889 whites had forced them out. In 911 the Kentucky Derby eliminated black jockeys after they won fifteen ofthe first twenty-eight derbies.74 Particularly in the South, whites attacked the richest nd most successful African Americans, just as they had the most acculturated Native Americans, so upward mobility offered no way out for blacks but only de them more of 3 target. In the North as well as in the South, whites forced These cartoons by Thomas Mast mirror the revival of racism in the North. Above. “And Not Tnis Man?” from Harper's weekly, August 5, 1865, provides evidence of Mast's idealism in the early days after the Civil War. Nine years later, as Reconstruction was beginning to wind down, Nast's images of African Americans reflected the increasing racism of the times. Opposite is “Colored Rule in a Reconstructed (?) State,” from the same journal, March 14, 1S74. Such idiotic

legislators could obviously be discounted as the white North contemplated giving up on black civil rights.

African Americans from skilled occupations and even unskilled jobs such as postal carriers.75 Eventually our system of segregation spread to South Africa, to Bermuda, and even to European-controlled enclaves in China.

American popular culture evolved to rationalize whites' retraction of civil and political rights from African Americans. The Bronx Zoo exhibited an African behind bars, like a gorilla.n Theatrical productions of Uncle Tom's Cabin played throughout the nadir, but since the novel's indictment of slavery was no longer congenial to an increasingly racist white society, rewrites changed Uncle Tom from a martyr who gave his life to protect his people into a sentimental dope who was loyal to kindly masters. In the black community, Uncle Tom evcntually came to mean an African American without integrity who sells out his people's interests. In the 1880s and 1890s, minstrel shows featuring bumbling, mislocuting whites in blackface grew wildly popular from New England to California. By presenting heavily caricatured images of African Americans who were happy on the plantation and lost and incompetent off it, these shows demeaned black ability. Minstrel songs such as “Carry Me Back to Old Virginny,” “Old Black Joe,” and “My Old Kentucky Home” told whites that Harriet Beecher Stowe got Uncle Tom's Cabin all wrong; blacks really liked slavery. Second-class citizenship was appropriate for such a sorry people.

Textbooks abandoned their idealistic presentations of Reconstruction in favor of the Confederate myth, for if blacks were inferior, then the historical period in which they enjoyed equal rights must have been dominated by wrong-thinking Americans. Vaudeville continued the portrayal of silly, lying, chicken-stealing black idiots. So did early silent movies. Some movies made more serious charges against African Americans: D, W. Griffith's racist epic Birth ofa Nation showed them obsessed with interracial sex and debased by corrupt white carpetbaggers.

Not only industrial jobs but even moving services were reserved for whites in some cities.

In politics, the white electorate had become so racist by 1892 that the Democratic candidate, Grover Cleveland, won the White House partly by tarring Republicans with their attempts to guarantee civil rights to African Americans,

thereby conjuring fears of “Negro domination” in the Northern as well as Southern white mind. From the Civil War to the end of the century, not a single Democrat in Congress, representing the North or the South, ever voted in favor of any civil rights legislation. The Supreme Court was worse: its segregationist decisions from 1896 (Pfery) through 1927 (Ricev. GongLum, which barred Chinese from white schools) told the nation that whites were the master race. We have seen how Woodrow Wilson won the presidency in 1912 and proceeded to segregate the federal government. Aided by Birth ofa Nation, which opened in 1915, the Ku Klux Klan rose to its zenith, boasting over a million members. The KKK openly dominated the state government of Indiana for a time, and it proudly inducted Pres, Warren G. Harding as a member in a White House ceremony. During the Wilson and Harding administrations, perhaps one hundred race riots took place, more than in any other period since Reconstruction. White mobs killed African Americans across the United States. Some of these events, like the 1919 Chicago riot, are well known. Others, such as the 1921 riot in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in which whites dropped dynamite from an airplane onto a black ghetto, killing more than 75 people and destroying more than 1,100 homes, have completely vanished from our history books.

It is almost unimaginable how racist the United States became during and just after the nadir. Mass attacks by whites wiped out or terrorized black communities in the Florida Keys, in Springfield, Illinois, and in the Arkansas Delta, and were an implicit, ever-present threat to every black neighborhood in the nation. Some small communities in the Midwest and West became “sundown” towns, informally threatening African Americans with death if they remained overnight. African Americans were excluded from juries throughout the South and in many places in the North, which usually meant they could forget about legal redress even for obvious wrongs like assault, theft, or arson by whites. Lynchings offer evidence of how defenseless blacks were, for the defining characteristic of a lynching is that the murder takes place in public, so everyone knows who did it, yet the crime goes unpunished. During the nadir lynchings took place as far north as Duluth. Once again, as Dred Scon had proclaimed in 1857, “a Negro had no rights a white man was bound to respect.” Every time African Americans interacted with European Americans, no matter how

insignificant the contact, they had to be aware of how they presented themselves, lest they give offense by looking someone in the eye, forgetting to say “sir,” or otherwise stepping out of “their place.” Always, the threat of overwhelming force lay just beneath the surface.

The nadir left African Americans in a dilemma. An “exodus” to form new black communities in the West did not lead to real freedom. Migration north led only to segregated urban ghettoes. Concentrating on Booker T. Washington's plan for economic improvement while foregoing civil and political rights could not work, because economic gains could not be maintained without civil and political rights.80 “Back to Africa” was not practicable.

Many African Americans lost hope; family instability and crime increased. This period of American life, not slavery, marked the beginning of what some social scientists have called the “tangle of pathology” in African American society. Indeed, some historians date low black morale to even later periods, such as the great migration to Northern cities (1918-70), the Depression (1929-39), or changes in urban life and occupational structure after World War II. Unfortunately, no textbook discusses the changing levels of white racism or black reaction in any of these periods. In any event this tangle was the result, not the cause, of the segregation and discrimination African Americans faced. Black jockeys and mail carriers were shut out, not because they were inadequate, but because they succeeded.

Lynch mobs often posed for the camera. They showed no fear of being identified because they knew no white jury would convict them. Mississippi: Conflict and Change, a revisionist state history textbook I co-wrote, was rejected by the Mississippi State Textbook Board partly because it included this photograph. At the trial that ensued, a rating committee member stated that material like this would make it hard for a teacher to control her students, especially a “white lady teacher” in a predominantly black class. At this point the judge took over the questioning. “Didn't lynchings happen in Mississippi?” he asked. Yes, admitted the rating committee member, but it was all so long ago, why dwell on it now? “It is a history book, isn't it?” asked the judge, who eventually ruled in the book's favor. None of the twelve textbooks in my sample includes a picture of a lynching. I hasten to reassure that no classroom riots resulted from our book or this photograph.

Several textbooks point out individual trees in the nadir forest. From The American Way students learn that “By the early 1900s, [white workers] had convinced most labor unions not to admit Blacks.” Land of Promise teaches that “Woodrow Wilson's administration was openly hostile to black people.” The United ScalesA History of the Republic mentions the exodus to Kansas. Seven textbooks mention the Chicago riot. Several offer a description of lynchings. All twelve books mention P/essy v. Ferguson. Life and Liberty reveals that Southern states passed “laws that took the vote away from blacks.” A History of the Republic, Ldnd of Promise, and The American Pageant provide enough trees that readers might infer some kind of forest, except that twenty pages on unrelated topics usually separate each tree from the next.“ Only American History and The American Adventure summarize the nadir period.S! The other ten textbooks offer no clue that race relations in the United States systematically worsened for almost half a century. None of the textbooks analyzes the causes of the worsening.84 Six textbooks imply or state that Jackie Robinson was ”the first black baseball player ever allowed in the major leagues,“ in the words of Life and Liberty, even though he wasn't, leaving students with the unmistakable implication of generally uninterrupted progress to the present,”

Textbook authors would not have to invent their descriptions of the nadir from scratch. African Americans have left a rich and bitter legacy from the period. Students who encounter Richard Wright's narrative of his childhood in Black Boy, read Ida B. Wells's description of a lynching in The Red Record, or sing aloud Big Bill Broonzy's “If You're Black, Get Back!” cannot but understand the plight of a people envisioning only a narrowing of their options. No book can convey the depths of the black experience without including material from the oppressed group. Yet not one textbook lets African Americans speak for themselves about the conditions they faced.

It is also crucial that students realize that the discrimination confronting African Americans during the nadir (and afterward) was national, not just Southern. Only The American Adventure points this out. Therefore most of my first-year college students have no idea that in many locales until after World War II, and continuing even today in some suburbs, the North too was segregated: that blacks

could not buy houses in communities around Minneapolis, could not work in the construction trades in Philadelphia, would not be hired as department store clerks in Chicago, and so on.

Even The American Adventure forgets its own coverage of the nadir and elsewhere offers this simplistic view of the period: “The years 1880-1910 seemed full of contradictions. . . . During Reconstruction many people tried hard to help the black people in the South. Then, for years, most white Americans paid little attention to the blacks. Little by little, however, there grew a new concern for them,” The trouble is, many white high school graduates share this world-view. Even if white concern for blacks has been only sporadic, they would argue, why haven't African Americans shaped up in the hundred-plus years since Reconstruction ended? After all, immigrant groups didn't have everything handed to them on a platter, either.

It is true that some immigrant groups faced harsh discrimination, from the No Irish Need Apply signs in Boston to the lynching of Italian Americans in New Orleans to the pogroms against Chinese work camps in California. Some white suburban communities in the North still shut out lews and Catholics. Nonetheless, the segregation and physical violence aimed at African Americans has been of a higher order of magnitude. If African Americans in the nadir had experienced only white indifference, as The American Adventure implies, rather than overt violent resistance, they could have continued to win Kentucky Derbies, deliver mail, and even buy houses in white neighborhoods. Their problem was not black failure or white indifferenceit was white racism.

Although formal racial discrimination grows increasingly rare, as young Americans grow up, they cannot avoid coming up against (he rift of race relations. They will encounter predominantly black athletic teams cheered by predominantly white cheerleaders on television, self-segregated dining rooms on college campuses, and arguments about affirmative action in the workplace. More than any other social variable (except sex!), race will determine whom they marry. Most of their friendship networks will remain segregated by race, and most churches, lodges, and other social organizations will be overwhelmingly either black or nonblack. The ethnic incidents and race riots of tomorrow will provoke still mote agonizing debate.

Since the nadir, the climate of race relations has improved, owing especially to the civil rights movement. But massive racial disparities remain, inequalities that can only be briefly summarized here. In 1990 African American median family income averaged only 57 percent of white family income; Native Americans and Hispanics averaged about 65 percent as much as whites. Money can be used to buy many things in our society, from higher SAT scores to the ability to swim, and African American, Hispanic, and Native American families lag in their access to all those things. Ultimately, money buys life itself, in the form of better nutrition and health care and freedom from danger and stress. It should therefore come as no surprise that in 1990 African Americans and Native Americans had median life expectancies at birth that were six years shorter than whites'.

On average, African Americans have worse housing, lower scores on IQ_ tests, and higher percentages of young men in jail. The sneaking suspicion that African Americans might be inferior goes unchallenged in the hearts of many blacks and whites. It is all too easy to blame the victim and. conclude that people of color are themselves responsible for being on the bottom. Without causal historical analysis, these racial disparities are impossible to explain.

When textbooks make racism invisible in American history, they obstruct our already poor ability to see it in the present. The closest they come to analysis is to present a vague feeling of optimism: in race relations, as in everything, our society is constantly getting better. We used to have slavery; now we don't. We used to have lynchings; now we don't. Baseball used to be all white; now it isn't. The notion of progress suffuses textbook treatments of black-white relations, implying that race relations have somehow steadily improved on their own. This cheery optimism only compounds the problem, because whites can infer that racism is over. “The U.S. has done more than any other nation in history to provide equal rights for all,” The American Tradition assures us. Of course, its authors have not seriously considered the levels of human rights in the Netherlands, Lesotho, or Canada today, or in Choctaw society in 1800, because they don't mean their declaration as a serious statement of comparative his toryit is just ethnocentric cheerleading.

High school students “have a gloomy view ofthe state

ofrace relations in America today," according to a recent nationwide poll. Students of all racial backgrounds brood about the subject.8' Another poll reveals that for the first time in this century, young white adults have less tolerant attitudes toward black Americans than those over thirty. One reason is that "the under-30 generation is pathetically ignorant of recent American history."87 Too young to have experienced or watched the civil rights movement as it happened, these young people have no understanding of the past and present workings of racism in American society.

Educators justify teaching history because it gives us perspective on the present. If there is one issue in the ptesent to which authors should relate the history they tell, the issue is racism. But as long as history textbooks make white racism invisible in the nineteenth century neither they nor the students who use them will be able to analyze racism intelligently in the present.

It is not only radical or currently unfashionable ideas that the texts leave outit is all ideas, including those of their heroes.

Frances FftzGeratti You may dispose of me very easily. I am nearly disposed of now. But this question is still to be settledthis Negro question, I mean; the end of that is not yet.

John Brown, 18S I am here to plead his cause with you. I plead not for his life, but for his char acterhis immortal life; and so it becomes your cause wholly, and is not his in the least.

Henry David Thoreau, "A Plea for Captain John Brown," 18 We shall need all the anti-slavery feeling in the country, and more; you can go home and try to bring the people to your views, and you may say anything you like about me, if that will help. . . . When the hour comes for dealing with slavery, I trust I will be willing to do my duty though it cost my life.

Abraham Lincoln to abolitionist Unitarian ministers, 18

Lies My Teacher Told Me

6. John Brown and Abraham Lincoln: The Invisibility of...

Perhaps the most telling criticism Frances FitzGerald made in her 1979 survey of American history textbooks, America Revised, was that they leave out ideas. As presented by textbooks of the 1970s, “American political life was completely mindless,” she observed.

Why would textbook authors avoid even those ideas with which they agree? Taking ideas seriously does not fit with the rhetorical style of textbooks, which presents events so as to make them seem foreordained along a line of constant progress. Including ideas would make history contingent: things could go either way, and have on occasion. The “right” people, armed with the “right” ideas, have not always won. When they didn't, the authors would be in the embarrassing position of having to disapprove of an outcome in the past. Including ideas would introduce uncertainty. This is not textbook style. Textbooks unfold history without real drama or suspense, only melodrama.

On the subject of race relations, John Brown's statement that “this question is still to be settled” seems as relevant today, and even as ominous, as when he spoke in 1859. The opposite of racism is antiracism, of course, or what we might call racial idealism or equalitarianism, and it is still not clear whether it will prevail. In this struggle, our history textbooks offer little help. Just as they underplay white racism, they also neglect racial idealism. In so doing, they deprive students of potential role models to call upon as they try to bridge the new fault lines that will spread out in the future from the great rift in our past.

Since ideas and ideologies played an especially important role in the Civil War era, American history textbooks give a singularly inchoate view of that Struggle, Just as textbooks treat slavery without racism, they treat abolitionism without much idealism.< Consider the most radical white abolitionist of them all, John Brown.

The treatment of Brown, like the treatment of slavery and Reconstruction, has changed in American history textbooks.

From 1890 to about 1970, John Brown was insane. Before 1890 he was perfectly sane, and after 1970 he regained his sanity. Since Brown himself did not change after his death, his sanity provides an inadvertent index of the level of white racism in our society. In today's textbooks, Brown makes two appearances: Pottawatomie, Kansas, and Harpers Ferry, Virginia. Recall that the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act tried to resolve the question of slavery through "popular sovereignty." The practical result of leaving the slavery decision to whoever settled in Kansas was an ideologically motivated settlement craze. Northerners rushed to live and farm in Kansas Territory and make it "free soil." Fewer Southern planters moved to Kansas with their slaves, but slaveowners from Missouri repeatedly crossed the Missouri River to vote in territorial elections and to establish a reign of terror to drive out the free-soil farmers. In May 1856 hundreds of proslavery "border ruffians," as they came to be called, raided the free-soil town of Lawrence, Kansas, burning down the hotel and destroying two printing presses. The American Tradition describes Brown's action at Pottawatomie: "In retaliation, a militant abolitionist named John Brown led a midnight attack on the proslavery settlement of Pottawatomie. Five people were killed by Brown and his followers." Discovering American History describes Brown's 1859 Harpers Ferry raid:

)ohn Brown, son of an abolitionist, envisioned a plan to invade the South and free the slaves. In 1859, with financial support from abolitionists, Brown made plans to start a slave rebellion in Virginia, to establish a free state in the Appalachian Mountains, and to spread the rebellion through the South. On October 16, 1859, Brown and eighteen of his men captured the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, in the present state of West Virginia. . . . He and his men were captured by a force of marines. Brown was brought to trial and convicted of treason & against Virginia, murder, and criminal conspiracy. He was hanged on December 2, 1859.

In all, seven of the twelve textbooks take this neutral approach to John Brown.7 Their bland paragraphs don't imply that Brown was crazy, but neither do they tell enough about him to explain why he became a hero to so many blacks and nonslaveholding whites.

Three textbooks still linger in a former era. "John Brown was almost certainly insane," opines American History. The American Way tells a whopper: "[L]ater Brown was proved

to be mentally ill." The American Pageant characterizes Brown as "deranged," "gaunt," "grim," "terrible," and "crackbrained," "probably of unsound mind," and says that "thirteen of his near relatives were regarded as insane, including his mother and grandmother." Two other books finesse the sanity issue by calling Brown merely "fanatical." No textbook has any sympathy for the man or takes any pleasure in his ideals and actions.

For the benefit of readers who, like me, grew up reading that Brown was at least fanatic if not crazed, let's consider the evidence. To be sure, some of Brown's lawyers and relatives, hoping to save his neck, suggested an insanity defense. But no one who knew Brown thought him crazy. He favorably impressed people who spoke with him after his capture, including his jailer and even reporters writing for Democratic newspapers, which supported slavery. Governor Wise of Virginia called him "a man of clear head" after Brown got the better of him in an informal interview. "They are themselves mistaken who take him to be a madman," Governor Wise said. In his message to the Virginia legislature he said Brown showed "quick and clear perception," "rational premises and consecutive reasoning," "composure and self-possession."

After 1890 textbook authors inferred Brown's madness from his plan, which admittedly was farfetched. Never mind that John Brown himself presciently told Frederick Douglass that the venture would make a stunning impact even if it failed. Nor that his twenty-odd followers can hardly all be considered crazed too." Rather, we must recognize that the insanity with which historians have charged John Brown was never psychological. It was ideological. Brown's actions made no sense to textbook writers between 1890 and about 1970, To make no sense is to be crazy.

Clearly, Brown's contemporaries did not consider him insane. Brown's ideological influence in the month before his hanging, and continuing after his death, was immense. He moved the boundary of acceptable thoughts and deeds regarding slavery. Before Harpers Ferry, to be an abolitionist was not quite acceptable, even in the North. Just talking about freeing slavesadvocating immediate emancipationwas behavior at the outer limit of the ideological continuum. By engaging in armed action, including murder, John Brown made mere verbal abolitionism seem much less radical.

After an initial shock wave of revulsion against Brown, in

the North as well as in the South, Americans were fascinated to hear what he had to say. In his 1859 trial John Brown captured the attention of the nation like no other abolitionist or slaveowner before or since. He knew it: “My whole life before had not afforded me one half the opportunity to plead for the right.”10 In his speech to the court on November 2, just before the judge sentenced him to die, Brown argued, “Had I so interfered in behalf of the rich, the powerful, it would have been all right.” He referred to the Bible, which he saw in the JOHN BROWN AND ABRAHAM LINCOLN . j6j courtroom, “which teaches me that all things whatsoever I would that men should do to me, I should do even so to them. It teaches me further, to remember them that are in bonds as bound with them. I endeavored to act up to that instruction.” Brown went on to claim the high moral ground: “I believe that to have interfered as I have done, as I have always freely admitted I have done, in behalf of His despised poor, I did no wrong but right.” Although he objected that his impending death penalty was unjust, he accepted it and pointed to graver injustices: “Now, if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance ofthe ends ofjustice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of my children and with the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments, I say, let it be done.”

Brown's willingness to go to the gallows for what he thought was right had a moral force of its own. “It seems as if no man had ever died in America before, for in order to die you must first have lived,” Henry David Thoreau observed in a eulogy in Boston. “These men, in teaching us how to die, have at the same time taught us how to live.” Thoreau went on to compare Brown with Jesus of Nazareth, who had faced a similar death at the hands of the state.

During the rest of November, Brown provided the nation graceful instruction in how to face death. In Larchmont, New York, George Templeton Strong wrote in his diary, “One's faith in anything is terribly shaken by anybody who is ready to go to the gallows condemning and denouncing it.”13 Brown's letters to his family and friends softened his image, showed his human side, and prompted an outpouring of sympathy for his children and soon-to-be widow, if not for Brown himself. His letters to supporters and remarks to journalists, widely circulated, formed a continuing indictment of slavery. We see his charisma in this letter from

“a conservative Christian”so the author signed itwritten to Brown in jail: “While I cannot approve of all your acts, J stand in awe of your position since your capture, and dare not oppose you lest I be found fighting against God; for you speak as one having authority, and seem to be strengthened from on high.”14 When Virginia executed John Brown on December 2, making him the first American since the founding of the nation to be hanged as a traitor, church bells mourned in cities throughout the North. Louisa May Alcott, William Dean Howells, Herman Melville, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Walt Whitman were among the poets who responded to the event. “The gaze of Europe is fixed at this moment on America,” wrote Victor Hugo from France. Hanging Brown, Hugo predicted, "will open a latent fissure that will finally split the Union asunder. The punishment ofJohn Brown may consolidate slavery in Virginia, but it will certainly shatter the American Democracy. You preserve your shame but you kill your glory.

Brown remained controversial after his death. Republican congressmen kept their distance from his felonious acts. Nevertheless, Southern slaveowners were appalled at the show of Northern sympathy for Brown and resolved to maintain slavery by any means necessary, including quitting the Union if they lost the next election. Brown's charisma in the North, meanwhile, was not spent but only increased due to what many came to view as his martyrdom. As the war came, as thousands of Americans found themselves making the same commitment to face death that John Brown had made, the force of his example took on new relevance. That's why soldiers marched into battle singing “John Brown's Body.” Two years later, church congregations sang Julia Ward Howe's new words to the song: “As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free”and the identification ofJohn Brown and Jesus Christ took another turn. The next year saw the 54th Massachusetts Colored Regiment parading through Boston to the tune, en route to its heroic destiny with death in South Carolina, while William Lloyd Garrison surveyed the cheering bystanders from a balcony, his hand resting on a bust ofJohn Brown. In February 1865 another Massachusetts colored regiment marched to the tune through the streets of" Charleston, South Carolina.

That was the high point of old John Brown. At the turn of the century, as southern and border states disfranchised African Americans, as lynchings proliferated, as blackface

minstrel shows came to dominate American popular culture, white America abandoned the last shards of its racial idealism. A history published in 1923 makes plain the connection to Brown's insanity: “The farther we get away from the excitement of 1859 the more we are disposed to consider this extraordinary man the victim of mental delusions.” Not until the civil rights movement of the 1960s was white America freed from enough of its racism to accept that a white person did not have to be crazy to die for black equality. In a sense, the murders of Mickey Schwerner and Andrew Goodman in Mississippi, James Reeb and Viola Liuzzo in Alabama, and various other white civil rights workers in various other southern states during the 1960s liberated textbook writers to see sanity again in John Brown. Rise ofthe American Nation, written in 1961, calls the Harpers Ferry plan “a wild idea, certain to fail,” while in Triumph ofthe American Nation, published in 1986, the plan becomes “a bold idea, but almost certain to fail.”

Frequently in American history the ideological needs ofwhite racists and black nationalists coincide. So it was with their views ofJohn Brown, During JOHN BROWN AND ABRAHAM LINCOLN

the heyday of the Black Power movement, I listened to speaker after speaker in a Mississippi forum denounce whites. “They are your enemies,” thundered one black militant. “Not one white person has ever had the best interests of black people at heart.” John Brown sprang to my mind, but the speaker anticipated my objection: “You might say John Brown did, but remember, he was crazy.” John Brown might provide a defense against such global attacks on whites, but, unfortunately, American history textbooks have erased him as a usable character.

No black person who met John Brown thought him crazy. Many black leaders of the day-Martin Delaney, Henry Highland Garnet, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and othersknew and respected Brown. Only illness kept Tubman from joining him at Harpers Ferry, The day of his execution black-owned businesses closed in mourning across the North. Frederick Dou glass called Brown “one of the greatest heroes known to American fame.” A black college deliberately chose to locate at Harpers Ferry, and in 1918 its alumni dedicated a memorial stone to Brown and his men “to commemorate their heroism.” The stone stated, in part, “That this nation might have a new birth of freedom, that slavery should be

removed forever from American soil, John Brown and his 21 men gave their lives."

Quite possibly textbooks should not portray this murderer as a hero, although other murderers, from Christopher Columbus to Nat Turner, get the heroic treatment. However, the flat prose that textbooks use for Brown is not really neutral. Textbook authors' withdrawal of sympathy from Brown is perceptible; their tone in presenting him is different from the tone they employ for almost everyone else. We see this, for instance, in their treatment of his religious beliefs. John Brown was a serious Christian, well read in the Bible, who took its moral commands to heart. Yet our textbooks do not credit Brown with religiositysubtly they blame him for it. "Believing himself commanded by God to free the slaves, Brown came up with a scheme . . . ," in the words of Ldnd ofPromise. The American Pageant calls Brown "narrowly ignorant," perhaps a euphemism for overly religious, and "God's angry man." "He believed that God had commanded him to free the slaves by force," states American History. God never commanded Brown in the sense of giving him instructions; rather, Brown thought deeply about the moral meaning of Christianity and decided that slavery was incompatible with it. He was also not "narrowly ignorant," having traveled widely in the United States, England, and Europe and talked with many American intellectuals of the day, black and white.

By way of comparison, consider Nat Turner, who in 1831 Jed the most important slave revolt since the United States became a nation. John Brown and Nat Turner both killed whites in cold blood. Both were religious, but, unlike Brown, Turner saw visions and heard voices. In most textbooks, Turner has become something of a hero. Several textbooks call Turner "deeply religious." None calls him "a religious fanatic." They reserve that term for Brown. The closest any textbook comes to suggesting that Turner might have been crazy is this passage from American History: "Historians still argue about whether or not Turner was insane." But the author immediately goes on to qualify, "The point is that nearly every slave hated bondage. Nearly all were eager to see something done to destroy the system." Thus even American History emphasizes the political and social meaning of Turner's act, not its psychological genesis in an allegedly questionable mind.

The textbooks' withdrawal of sympathy from Brown is

also apparent in what they include and exclude about his life before Harpers Ferry. “In the 184s he somehow got interested in helping black slaves,” according to American Adventures. Brown's interest is no mystery: he learned it from his father, who was a trustee of Oberlin College, a center of abolitionist sentiment, if Adventures wanted, it could have related the well-known story about how young John made friends with a black boy during the War of 1812, which convinced him that blacks were not inferior. Instead, its sentence reads like a slur. Textbook authors make Brown's Pottawatomie killings seem equally unmotivated by neglecting to tell that the violence in Kansas had hitherto been perpetrated primarily by the proslavery side. Indeed, slavery sympathizers had previously killed six free-soil settlers. Several years before Pottawatomie, at Osawatomie, Kansas, Brown had helped thirty-five free-soil men defend themselves against several hundred marauding proslavery men from Missouri, thereby earning the nickname “Osawatomie John Brown.” Not one textbook mentions what Brown did at Osawatomie, where he was the defender, but eight of the twelve tell what he did at Pottawatomie, where he was the attacker.'

Our textbooks also handicap Brown by not letting him speak for himself. Even his jailer let Brown put pen to paper! American History includes three important sentences; American Adventures gives us almost two. The American Pageant reprints three sentences from a letter Brown wrote his brother. The other nine books do not provide even a phrase. Brown's words, which moved a nation, therefore do not move students today.

Textbook authors have an additional reason to avoid Brown's ideas: they are tinged with Christianity. Religion has been one of the great inspirations and JOHN BROWN AND ABRAHAM LINCOLN

explanations of human enterprise in this country. Yet textbooks, while they may mention religious organizations such as the Shakers or Christian Science, never treat religious ideas in any period seriously.20 An in-depth portrayal of Mormonism, Christian Science, or the Methodism ofthe Great Awakening would be controversial. Mentioning atheism or Deism would be even worse. “Are you going to tell kids that Thomas Jefferson didn't believe in Jesus? Not me!” a text book editor exclaimed to me. Treating religious ideas neutrally, nonreligiously, simply as factors in society, won't do either, for that would likely offend some adherents. The

textbooks' solution is to leave out religious ideas entirely.21 Quoting John Brown's courtroom words“whatsoever I would that men should do to me, I should do even so to them”would violate the taboo.

Ideological contradiction is terribly important in history. Ideas have power. The ideas that motivated John Brown and the example he set lived on long after his body lay a-moldering in the grave. Yet American history textbooks give us no way to understand the role of ideas in our past.

Conceivably, textbook authors ignore John Brown's ideas because in their eyes his violent acts make him ineligible for sympathetic consideration. When we turn from Brown to Abraham Lincoln, we shift from one of the most controversial to one of the most venerated figures in American history. Textbooks describe Abraham Lincoln with sympathy, of course. Nonetheless they also minimize his ideas, especially on the subject of race. In life Abraham Lincoln wrestled with the race question more openly than any other president except perhaps Thomas Jefferson, and, unlike Jefferson, Lincoln's actions sometimes matched his words. Most of our textbooks say nothing about Lincoln's internal debate. If they did show it, what teaching devices they would become! Students would see that speakers modify their ideas to appease and appeal to different audiences, so we cannot simply take their statements literally. If textbooks recognized Lincoln's racism, students would learn that racism not only affects Ku Klux Klan extremists but has been “normal” throughout our history. And as they watched Lincoln struggle with himself to apply America's democratic principles across the color line, students would see how ideas can develop and a person can grow.

In conversation, Lincoln, like most whites of his century, referred to blacks as “niggers.” When responding 10 Stephen Douglas's race-baiting in the Lincoin-Douglas debates, Lincoln himself sometimes descended into explicit white supremacy: “I have no purpose to introduce political and social equality between the white and black races. There is a physical difference between the two, which in my judgment will probably forever forbid their living together upon the footing ofperfect equality, and inasmuch as it becomes a necessity that there must be a difference, I as well as Judge Douglas am in favor of the race to which I belong, having the superior position,“” Only one textbook quotes [his passage; the rest censor Lincoln's racist ideas, as they censored Douglas's.;J

Lincoln's attitudes about race were more complicated than Douglas's, however. The day after Douglas declared for white supremacy in Chicago, saying the issues were “distinctly drawn,” Lincoln replied and indeed drew the issue distinctly: “I should like to know if taking this old Declaration of Independence, which declares that all men are equal upon principle, and making exceptions to itwhere will it stop? If one man says it does not mean a Negro, why does not another say it does not mean some other man? If that Declaration is not . . . true, let us tear it out! [Cries of ”no, nol“] Let us stick to it then, let us stand firmly by it then.”24 No textbook quotes this passage, and every book but one leaves out Lincoln's thundering summation of what his debates with Douglas were really about: ”That is the issue that will continue in this country when these poor tongues of Judge Douglas and myself shall be silent. It is the eternal struggle between these two principlesright and wrongthroughout the world,

Lincoln's realization ofthe basic humanity ofAfrican Americans may have derived from his father, who moved the family to Indiana partly because he disliked the racial slavery that was sanctioned in Kentucky, Or it may stem from an experience Lincoln had on a steamboat trip in 1841, which he recalled years later when writing to his friend Josh Speed: “You may remember, as I well do, that from Louisville to the mouth of the Ohio there were on board ten or twelve slaves, shackled together with irons. That sight was continual torment to me, and I see something like it every time I touch the Ohio, or any other slaveborder.” Lincoln concluded that the memory still had “the power of making me miserable.”26 No textbook quotes this letter.

As early as 1835, in his first term in the Illinois House of Representatives, Lincoln cast one of only five votes opposing a resolution that condemned abolitionists. Textbooks imply that Lincoln was nominated for president in I860 because he was a moderate on slavery, but, in fact, Republicans chose Lincoln over front-runner William H. Seward partly because of Lincoln's “rock-solid antislavery beliefs,” while Seward was considered a compromiser.

As president, Lincoln understood the importance of symbolic leadership in improving race relations. For the first time the United States exchanged ambassadors with Haiti and Liberia. In 1863 Lincoln desegregated the White House staff, which initiated a desegregation of" the federal

lasted until Woodrow Wilson. Lincoln opened the White House to black callers, notably Frederick Douglass, He also \tontinued to wrestle with his own racism, asking aides to investigate the feasibility of deporting (euphemistically termed “colonizing”) African Americans to Africa or Latin America,

Six of the twelve textbooks mention that Lincoln opposed slavery. Two even quote his 1864 letter; “If slavery isn't wrong, then nothing is wrong.”28 However, most textbook authors take pains to separate Lincoln from undue idealism about slavery. They venerate Lincoln mainly because he “saved the Union,” By far their favorite statement of Lincoln's, quoted or paraphrased by nine of the twelve books, is his letter of August 22, 1862, to Horace Greeley's New York Tribune;

If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that. What I do about slavery and the colored race I do because I believe it helps to save this Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union.... I have here stated tny purpose according to my view of official duty, and I intend no modification of my oft-expressed personal wish that all men, everywhere could be free.

Most textbooks don't let students see all of the above quotation; seven of the nine leave out the last sentence,29 Thus they present a Lincoln who was morally indifferent to slavery and certainly did not care about black people. Ironically, this is also the Lincoln whom black nationalists present to African Americans to persuade them to stop thinking well of him.

Every historian knows that the fragment of Lincoln's letter to Greeley that most textbooks supply does not represent his intent regarding slavery. Lincoln wrote the letter to seek support for the war from Northern supporters of slavery. He aimed it not at Greeley, who wanted slavery to end, but at antiwar Democrats, antiblack Irish Americans, governors of the border states, and the many Republicans who opposed emancipating the slaves. Saving the Union had never been Lincoln's sole concern, as shown by his 1860 rejection of the eleventhhour Crittenden Compromise, a constitutional amendment intended to preserve the Union by preserving

slavery forever." Every textbook writer knows that a month before Lincoln wrote to Greeley, he had presented the Emancipation Proclamation to his cabinet as an irreversible decision, but no textbook makes this clear. Not one explains the political context or the intended audience for the Greeley letter. Nor does a single textbook quote Lincoln's encouragement that same summer to Unitarian ministers to “go home and try to bring the people to your views,” because “we shall need all the anti-slavery feeling in the country, and more.” If they did, students might understand that indifference was not Lincoln's only response to the issue ofslavery in America.

When textbook's discuss the Emancipation Proclamation, they explain Lincoln's actions in realpolitik terras. “By September 1862,” says Triumph ofthe American Nation, “Lincoln had reluctantly decided that a war fought at least partly to free the slaves would win European support and lessen the danger of foreign intervention on the side of the Confederacy.” Triumph has forgotten its own earlier judgment: “President Lincoln had long believed slavery to be wrong.“ For if Lincoln opposed slavery, why would he emancipate ”reluctantly” and merely for reasons related to international politics?

To be sure, international and domestic political concerns did impinge on Abraham Lincoln, master politician that he was. But so did considerations of right and wrong. Political analysts then and now believe that Lincoln's September 1862 announcement of emancipation cost Republicans the control of Congress the following November, because Northern white public opinion would not evolve to favor black freedom for another year.32 Textbook authors suppress the possibility that Lincoln acted at least in part because he thought it was right. From Indian wars to slavery to Vietnam, textbook authors not only sidestep putting questions of right and wrong to our past actions but even avoid acknowledging that Americans of the time did so.

Abraham Lincoln was one of the great masters of the English language. Perhaps more than any other president he invoked and manipulated powerful symbols in his speeches to move public opinion, often on the subject of race relations and slavery. Textbooks, in keeping with their habit of telling everything in the authorial monotone, dribble out Lincoln's words three and four at a time. The only complete speech or letter any of them provide is the Gettysburg Address, and

only four of the twelve textbooks dispense even that. Lincoln's three paragraphs at Gettysburg comprise one of the most important speeches ever given in America and take up only a fourth of a page in the textbooks that include them. Nonetheless five books do not even mention the speech, while three others provide only the last sentence or phrase from it: “government of the people, by the people, for the people.”

Lincoln understood that fighting a war for freedom was ideologically more satisfying than fighting simply to preserve a morally neutral Union. To JOHN BROWN AND ABRAHAM LINCOLN

save the Union, it was necessary to find rationales for the war other than “to save the Union.” At Gettysburg he provided one.

Lincoln was a fine lawyer who knew full well that the United States was conceived in slavery, for the Constitution specifically treats slavery in at least three places. Nevertheless he began, “Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” Thus Lincoln wrapped the Union cause in the rhetoric of the Declaration of Independence, which emphasized freedom even while many of its signers were slaveowners.35 In so doing, Lincoln was at the same time using the Declaration to redefine the Union cause, suggesting that it ultimately implied equal rights for all Americans, regardless of race.

“Now we are engaged in a great civil war,” Lincoln continued, “testing whether that nation or any nation, so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure.” Again, Lincoln knew better: by 1863 other nations had joined us in democracy. For that matter, every European nation and most American nations had outlawed slavery. How did our civil war test whether they could endure? Here Lincoln was wrapping the Union cause in the old “last best hope of mankind” cloak, a secular version of the idea of a special covenant between the United States and God.i4 Although bad history, such rhetoric makes for great speeches. The president thus appealed to the antiwar Democrats of the North to support the war effort for the good of all mankind.

After invoking a third powerful symbol-“the brave men, living and dead, who struggled here”-Lincoln closed by identifying the cause for which so many had died: “that this

nation, under Cod, shall have a new birth of freedom." To what freedom did he refer? Black freedom, of course. As Lincoln well knew, the war itself was undermining slavery, for what began as a war to save the Union increasingly had become a war for black freedom. Citizens at the time understood Lincoln perfectly. Indeed, throughout this period Americans purchased copies of political speeches, read them, discussed issues, and voted at rates that now seem impossibly high. The Chicago Times, a Democratic newspaper, denounced the address precisely because of "the proposition that all men are created equal." The Union dead, claimed the Times, "were men possessing too much self-respect to declare that Negroes were their equals, or were entitled to equal privileges."

Textbooks need not explain Lincoln's words at Gettysburg as I have done. The Gettysburg Address is rich enough to survive various analyses.5" But of the four books that do reprint the speech, three merely put it in a box by itself in a corner of the page. Only Li/e andLiberty asks intelligent questions about it.57 As a result, I have yet to meet a high school graduate who has devoted any time to thinking about the Gettysburg Address,

Even worse is textbook treatment of Lincoln's Second Inaugural. In this towering speech, one of the masterpieces of American oratory, Lincoln specifically identified differences over slavery as the primary cause of the Civil War, then in its fourth bloody year.)B "If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through his appointed time, he now wills to remove, and that he gives to both North and South this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to him?" Lincoln continued in this vein by invoking the doctrine of predestination, a more vital element of the nation's idea system then than now: "Fondly do we hope-fervently do we praythat this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'"

This last is an astonishing sentence. Its length alone astounds. Politicians don't talk like that nowadays. When students read this passage aloud, slowly and deliberately, they do not fail to perceive it as a searing indictment of America's sins against black people. The Civil War was by far the most devastating experience in our nation's history Yet we had it coming, Lincoln says here. And in his rhetorical context, sin or crime, not mere tragedy, is the fitting and proper term. Indeed, this indictment of U.S. race relations echoes John Brown's last note: “I, John Brown, am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away, but with Blood.”

Lincoln's Second Inaugural made such an impact on Americans that when the president was shot, a month later, farmers in New York and Ohio greeted his funeral train with placards bearing its phrases. But only The United Slates-A History ofthe Republic includes any of the material quoted above. Five other textbooks restrict their quotation to the speech's final phrase, about binding up the nation's wounds “with malice toward none,” The other six textbooks ignore the speech altogether.

Like Helen Keller's concern about the injustice of social class, Lincoln's concern about the crime of racism may appear unseemly to textbook authors.

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The strange career of the log cabin in which Abraham Lincoln was born symbolizes in a way what textbooks nave done to Lincoln. The actual cabin fell into disrepair probably before Lincoln became president. According to research by D. T. Pitcaithley, tbe new cabin, a hoax built in 1894, was leased to two amusement park owners, went to Coney Island, where it got commingled with the birthplace cabin of Jefferson Davis (another hoax], and was finally shrunk to fit inside a marble pantheon in Kentucky, where, reassembled, it still stands. The cabin also became a children's toy; Lincoln Logs, invented by Frank Lloyd Wright's son John in 1920, came with instructions on how to build both Lincoln's log cabin and Uncle Tom's cabinl The cabin still makes its archetypal appearance in our textbooks, signifying the rags to riches legend of Abraham Lincoln's upward mobility. No wonder one college student could only say of him, in a much-repeated biooper, “He was born in a log cabin which he built with his own hands.”

Must we remember Lincoln for ibat? Let's leave it out!

Such an approach to Lincoln might be called the Walt Disney interpretation: Disney's exhibit at the 1964 New York World's Fair featured an animated sculpture of Lincoln that spoke for several minutes, choosing “his” words carefully to say nothing about slavery.

Having disconnected Abraham Lincoln from considerations of right and wrong, several textbooks present the Civil War the same way. In reality, United States soldiers, who began righting to save the Union and not much more, ended by righting for all the vague but portentous ideas in the Gettysburg Address, From 1862 on, Union armies sang “Battle Cry of Freedom,” composed by George Root in the summer of that year:

We will we/come to our numbers the loyal true and brave, Shooting the battle cry of freedom. And although he may be poor, no! a man shall be a slave. Shouting she battle cry of freedom.'"

Surely no one can sing these lines even today without perceiving that both freedom and the preservation of the Union were war aims of the United States and without feeling some of the power of that potent combination. This power is what textbooks omit: they give students no inkling that ideas matter.

The actions of African Americans played a big role in challenging white racism. Slaves fled to Union lines. After they were allowed to fight, the contributions of black troops to the war effort made it harder for whites to deny that blacks were fully human.1“ A Union captain wrote to his wife, ”A great many [whites] have the idea that the entire Negro race are vastly their inferiorsa few weeks of calm unprejudiced life here would disabuse them, I thinkI have a more elevated opinion of their abilities than I ever had before."42 Unlike historians of a few decades ago, today's textbook authors realize that trying to present the war without the actions of African Americans makes for bad history. All twelve current textbooks at least mention that more than 180,000 blacks fought Triumpli of the American Nation includes this evocative photograph of the crew of the USS Hunchback in the Civil War. Such racial integration disappeared during the nadir of race relations in the United States, from 1890 to 1920.

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in the Union army and navy. Several of the textbooks include an illustration of African American soldiers and

describe the unequal pay they received until late in the war. Discovering American History mentions that Union soldiers trapped behind Confederate lines found slaves to be “of invaluable assistance.” Only The United StalesA History ofthe Republic, however, takes the next step by pointing out how the existence and success of black troops decreased white racism.

The antiracist repercussions of the Civil War were particularly apparent in the border states. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation applied only to the Confederacy. It left slavery untouched in Unionist Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri. But the war did not. The status of planters became ambiguous: owning black people was no longer what a young white man aspired to do or what a young white woman aspired to accomplish by marriage. Maryland was a slave state with considerable support for the Confederacy at the onset of the war. But Maryland held for the Union and sent thousands of soldiers to defend Washington. What happened next provides a “positive” example of the effects of cognitive dissonance: for Maryland whites to fight a war against slaveowners while allowing slavery within their own state created a tension that demanded resolution. In 1864 the increasingly persuasive abolitionists in Maryland brought the issue to a vote. The tally went narrowly against emancipation until the large number of absentee ballots were counted. By an enormous margin, these ballots were for freedom. Who cast most absentee ballots in 1864 in Maryland? Soldiers and sailors, of course. Just as these soldiers marched into battle with “John Brown's Body” upon their lips, so their minds had changed to favor the freedom that their actions were forging.

As noted in the previous chapter, songs such as “Nigger Doodle Dandy” reflect the racist tone of the Democrats' presidential campaign in 1864. How did Republicans counter? In part, they sought white votes by being antiracist. The Republican campaign, boosted by military victories in the fall of] 864, proved effective. The Democrats' overt appeals to racism failed, and antiracist Republicans triumphed almost everywhere. One New York Republican wrote, “The change of opinion on this slavery question . . . is a great and historic fact. Who could have predicted . . , this great and blessed revolution?”45 People around the OPPOSITE: This is the October 15, 1864, centerfold of Harper's magazine, which throughout the nineteenth century

was the mouthpiece of the Republican party. The words are from the Democratic platform. The illustrations, by young Thomas Nast, show shortcomings in the Democratic plan. Ore could hardly imagine a political party today seeking white votes on the basis of such racial idealism.

The Democratic platform began innocuously enough: “We will adhere with unswerving fidelity to the UNION under the CONSTITUTION as the ONLY solid foundation of our STRENGTH, SECURITY, and HAPPINESS as a PEOPLE,” But Mast's illustration was a knockout: he shows siavecatchers and dogs pursuing hapless runaways into a swamp. He jolts the reader to exclaim. What aoout them? These are people too!

world supported the Union because of its ideology. Forty thousand Canadians alone, some of them black, came south to volunteer for the Union cause.

Ideas made the opposite impact in the Confederacy. Ideological contradictions afflicted the slave system even before the war began, John Brown knew that masters secretly feared that their slaves might revolt, even as they assured abolitionists that slaves really liked slavery. One reason his Harpers Ferry raid prompted such an outcry in the South was that slaveowners feared their slaves might join him. Yet their condemnations of Brown and the “Black Republicans” who financed him did not persuade Northern moderates but only pushed them toward the abolitionist camp. After all, if Brown was truly dangerous, as slaveowners claimed, then slavery was truly unjust. Happy slaves would never revolt.

White Southerners founded the Confederacy on the ideology of white supremacy. According to Alexander Stephens, vice-president of the Confederacy: “Our new government's foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests, upon the great truth that the Negro is not equal to the white man, that slaverysubordination to the superior raceis his natural and normal condition.” Confederate soldiers on their way to Antietam and Gettysburg, their two main forays Illustrating “PUBLIC LIBERTY and PRIVATE RIGHT,” Nast shows the New York City draft riot of 1863: white thugs are exercising their “right” to beat and kill African Americans, including a child held upside down.

into Union states, put this ideology into practice: they seized scores of free black people in Maryland and Pennsylvania and sent them south into slavery. Confederates maltreated black Union troops when they captured them.47

Throughout the war, “the protection of slavery had been and still remained the central core of Confederate purpose.”48 Textbooks downplay all this, probably because they do not want to offend white Southerners loday.

The safeguarding of states' rights, often mentioned as a motive for the establishment of the Confederacy, was for the most part merely an accompanying rationale. Historically, whatever faction has been out of power in America has pushed for states' rights. Slaveowners were delighted when Supreme Court Chief Justice Taney decided in 1857 that throughout the nation, irrespective of the wishes of state or territorial governments, blacks had no rights that whites must respect. Slaveowners pushed President Buchanan to use federal power to legitimize slaveholding in Kansas the next year. Only after they lost control of the executive branch in the 1860 election did they advocate limiting federal power.

As the war continued, neither states' rights nor white supremacy proved adequate to the task of inspiring a new nation. As early as December 1862,

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Pres. Jefferson Davis denounced states' rights as destructive to the Confederacy, The mountainous counties in western Virginia bolted to the Union. Confederate troops had to occupy east Tennessee to keep it from emulating West Virginia, Winn Parish, Louisiana, refused to secede from the Union. Winston County, Alabama, declared itself che Republic of Winston. Unionist farmers and woodsmen in Jones County, Mississippi, declared the Free State of Jones, Every Confederate state except South Carolina supplied a regiment or at least a company of white soldiers to the Union army, as well as many black recruits. Armed guerrilla actions plagued every Confederate state. (With the exception of Missouri, and the 1863 New York City draft riots, few Union states were afflicted with such problems.) It became dangerous for Confederates to travel in parts of Alabama, Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas. The war was fought not just between North and South but between Unionists and Confederates within the Confederacy (and Missouri).50 By February 1864 President Davis despaired: “Public meetings of treasonable character, in the name of state sovereignty, are being held.” Thus stales' rights as an ideology was contradictory and could not mobilize the white South for the long haul.

The racial ideas of the Confederate states proved even less

serviceable to the war effort. According to Confederate ideology, blacks liked slavery; nevertheless, to avert revolts and runaways, the Confederate states passed the “twenty nigger law,” exempting from military conscription one white man as overseer for every twenty slaves. Throughout the war Confederates withheld as much as a third of their fighting forces from the front lines and scattered them throughout areas with large slave populations to prevent slave uprisings.1 When the United States allowed African Americans to enlist, Confederates were forced by their ideology to assert that it would not work-blacks would hardly fight like white men. The undeniable bravery of the 54th Massachusetts and other black regiments disproved the idea of black inferiority. Then came the incongruity of truly beastly behavior by Southern whites toward captured black soldiers, such as the infamous Fort Pillow massacre by troops under Nathan Bedford Forrest, who crucified black prisoners on tent frames and then burned them alive, all in the name of preserving white civilization.

Contradiction piled upon contradiction. After the fall of Vicksburg, President Davis proposed to arm slaves to fight for the Confederacy, promising them freedom to win their cooperation. But ifservitude was the best condition for the slave, protested supporters of slavery, how could freedom be a reward? To win foreign recognition, other Confederate leaders proposed to abolish slavery altogether. Some newspaper editors concurred. “Although slavery is one of the principles that we started to fight for,“ said the Jackson Mississippian, if it mim be jettisoned to achieve our ”separate nationality, away with it!” A month before Appomattox, the Confederate Congress passed a measure to enroll black troops, showing how the war had elevated even slaveowners' estimations of black abilities and also revealing complete ideological disarray. What, after all, would the new black soldiers be fighting far? Slavery? Secession? What, for that matter,

would white Southern troops be fighting for, once blacks were also armed? As Howell Cobb of Georgia said, “If slaves will make good soldiers our whole theory of slavery is wrong.”

In part owing to these contradictions, some Confederate soldiers switched sides, beginning as early as 1862. When Sherman made his famous march to the sea from Atlanta to Savannah, his army actually grew in number, because

thousands of white Southerners volunteered along the way. Meanwhile, almost two-thirds of the Confederate army opposing Sherman disappeared through desertion,54 Eighteen thousand slaves also joined Sherman, so many that the army had to turn some away. Compare these facts with the portrait common in our textbooks of Sherman's marauders looting their way through a united South!

The increasing ideological confusion in the Confederate states, coupled with the increasing ideological strength of the United States, helps explain the Union victory. “Even with all the hardships,” Carleton Deals has noted, “the South up to the very end still had great resources and manpower.” Many nations and people have continued to fight with far inferior means and weapons. Beals thinks that the Confederacy's ideological contradictions were its gravest liabilities, ultimately causing its defeat. He shows how the Confederate army was disbanding by the spring of 1865 in Texas and other states, even in the absence of Union approaches. On the home front too, as Jefferson Davis put it, “The zeal of the people is failing.”

Five textbooks tell how the issue of states' rights interfered with the Confederate cause,5 Only The American Adventure gives students a clue of any other ideological weakness of the Confederacy or strength of the Union. Adventure tells how slavery broke down when Union armies came near and that many poor whites in the South did not support the war because they felt they would be fighting for slaveowners. Ac/venterf also quotes original sources on the evolution of Union war aims and asks, “How would such attitudes affect the conduct and outcome of the war?” No other textbook mentions ideas or ideologies as a strength or weakness of either side. The Civil War was about something, after all. Textbooks should tell us what.

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This silence has a history. Throughout this century textbooks have presented the Civil War as a struggle between “virtually identical peoples.” This is all part of the unspoken agreement, reached during the nadir of race relations in the United States (1890-1920), that whites in the South were as American as whites in the North.58 White Northerners and white Southerners reconciled on the backs of African Americans, while the abolitionists became the bad guys.

In the 1920s the Grand Army of the Republic, the organization of Union veterans, complained that American

history textbooks presented the Civil War with “no suggestion” ihat the Union cause was right. Apparently the United Daughters of the Confederacy carried more weight with publishers,“ The UDC was even able to erect a statue to the Confederate dead in Wisconsin, claiming they ”died to repel unconstitutional invasion, to protect the rights reserved to the people, to perpetuate the sovereignty of the states"60 Not a word about slavery, or even disunion.

History textbooks still present Union and Confederate sympathizers as equally idealistic. The North fought to hold the Union together, while the Southern states fought, according to The American Way, “for the preservation of their rights and freedom to decide for themselves.” Nobody fought to preserve racial slavery; nobody fought to end it. As one result, unlike the Nazi swastika, which lies disgraced, even in the North whites still proudly display the Stars and Bars of the Confederacy on den walls, license plates, T-shirts, and high school logos. Even some (white) Northerners vaguely regret the defeat of the “lost cause.” It is as if racism against blacks could be remembered with nostalgia.61 In this sense, long after Appomattox, the Confederacy finally won.

Five days after Appomattox, President Lincoln was murdered. His martyrdom pushed Union ideology one step further. Even whites who had opposed emancipation now joined to call Lincoln the great emancipator.62 Under Republican leadership, the nation entered Reconstruction, a period of continuing ideological conflict.

At first Confederates tried to maintain prewar conditions through new laws, modeled after their slave codes and antebellum restrictions on free blacks. Mississippi was the first state to pass these draconian “Black Codes.” They did not work, however. The Civil War had changed American ideology. The new antiracism forged in its flames would dominate Northern thinking for a decade. The Chicago Tribune, the most important organ of the Republican party in the Midwest, responded angrily: “We tell the white men of Mississippi that the men of the North will convert the state of Mississippi into a frog pond before they will allow any such laws to disgrace one foot of soil in which the bones of our soldiers sleep and over which the flag of freedom waves.“65 Thus black civil rights again became the central issue in the congressional elections of 1866. ”Support Congress and You Support the Negro,“ said the Democrats in a campaign broadside featuring a disgusting caricature of an African

American. ”Sustain the Presi dent and You Protect the White Man.“64 Northern voters did not buy it. They returned ”radical“ Republicans to Congress in a thunderous repudiation of Pres. Andrew Johnson's accommodation of the ex-Confederates. Even more than in 1864, when Republicans swept Congress in 1866 antiracism became the policy of the nation, agreed to by most of its voters. Over Johnson's veto, Congress and the slates passed the Fourteenth Amendment, making all persons citizens and guaranteeing them ”the equal protection of the laws.” The passage, on behalf of blacks, of this shining jewel of our Constitution shows how idealistic were the officeholders of the Republican Party, particularly when we consider that similar legislation on behalfofwomen cannot be passed today.

During Reconstruction a surprising variety of people went to the new civilian “front lines” and worked among the newly freed African Americans in the South. Many were black Northerners, including several graduates of Oberlin College, This passage from a letter by Edmonia Highgate, a white woman who went south to teach school, describes her life in Lafayette Parish, Louisiana.

The majority of my pupils come from plantations, three, four and even eight miles distant. So anxious are they to learn that they walk these distances so early in the morning as never to be tardy.

There has been much opposition to the School. Twice I have been shot at in my room. My night school scholars have been shot but none killed. A week ago an aged freedman just across the way was shot so badly as to break his arm and leg. The rebels here threatened to burn down the school and house in which I board yet they have not materially harmed us. The nearest military protection is 200 miles distant at New Orleans.

Some Union soldiers stayed in the South when they were demobilized. Some Northern Republican would-be politicians moved south to organize their parry in a region where it had not been a factor before the war. Some went hoping to win office by election or appointment. Many abolitionists continued their commitment by working in the Freedman's Bureau and priva[e organizations to help blacks obtain full civil and political rights. In terms ofparty affiliation, almost all of these persons were Republicans; otherwise, they were a

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The white woman at left, whom textbooks would call a

“carpetbagger.” could hardlyj expect to grow rich teaching school hear Vicksbutg, where this illustration was done. | This woman risked her life to bring basic literacy to African American children and'j aduIts during Reconstruction.

diverse group. Still, all but one of the twelve textbooks routinely use the disgraceful old tag carpeibaggers, without noting its bias, lo describe Northern white] Republicans who lived in the South during Reconstruction.

Many whites who were born in the South supported Reconstruction.! Every Southern state boasted Unionists, some of whom had volunteered for ilic Union army. They now became Republicans. Some former Confederates,! including even Gen. James Longstreet, second in command under Lee at Gettys-. burg, became Republicans because they had grown convinced that equality for | blacks was morally right. Robert Flournoy, a Mississippi planter, had raised a company of Confederate soldiers but then resigned his commission and returned home because “there was a conflict in my conscience.” During the war he was once arrested for encouraging blacks to flee to Union lines. During Reconstruction he helped organize the Republican party, published a newspaper, EqudRights, and argued for desegregating the University ofMississippi and the new state's public school system.hs Republican policies, including free public education, never before available in the South to children of either race, convinced some poor whites to vote for the party Many former Whigs became Republicans rather than join their old nemesis, the Democrats. Some white Southerners became Republicans because they were convinced that black suf frage was an accomplished fact; they preferred winning political power with blacks on their side to losing. Others became Republicans to make connections or win contracts from the new Republican state governments. Of the 113 white Republican congressmen from the South during Reconstruction, 53 were Southerners, many of them from wealthy families.69 In sum, this is another diverse group, amounting to between one-fourth and one-third of the white population and in some counties a majority. Nevertheless all but one textbook still routinely apply the disgraceful old tag scalawags to Southern white Republicans,

Carpetbaggers and scalawags are terms coined by white Southern Democrats to defame their opponents as illegitimate. Reconstruction-era newspapers in Mississippi, at least, used Republicans far more often than aaperbaggffi or

scdlawags. Carpeibaer implies that the dregs of Northern society, carrying all their belongings in a carpetbag, had come down to make their fortunes off the “prostrate [white] south.” Scalawag means “scoundrel.” Employing these terms would be appropriate if textbook authors made clear that they were terms of the time and explained who used them and in what circumstances. But textbooks incorporate them as if they were proper historical labels, with no quotation marks, in preference to neutral terms such as Reconstruction Republicans.

Consider these sentences from The United StatesA History ofthe Republic: “In Mississippi the carpetbaggers controlled politics. In Tennessee the scalawags did.” Or this from The American Tradition: “Despite southern white claims to the contrary, the Radical regimes were not dominated by blacks, but by scalawags and carpetbaggers.” In reality, “scalawags” were Southern whites, of course, but this sentence writes them out of the white South, just as die-hard Confederates were wont to do. Moreover, referring to perfectly legal governments as “regimes” is a way of delegitimizing them, a technique Tradition applies to no other administration, not even the 1836 Republic of Texas or the 1893 Dole pineapple takeover in Hawaii,

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To be sure, newer editions of American history textbooks no longer denounce Northerners who participated in Southern politics and society as “dishonest adventurers whose only thought was to feather their own nests at the expense of their fellows,” as Rise of the American Nation put it in 1961. Again, the civil rights movement has allowed us to rethink our history. Having watched Northerners, black and white, go south to help blacks win civil rights in the 1960s, today's textbook authors display more sympathy for Northerners who worked with Southern blacks during Reconstruction.71 Here is the paragraph on “carpetbaggers” from Rise's successor, Triumph ofthe American Nation:

The carpetbaggers came for many different reasons. Some sincerely wanted to help the freed slaves exercise their newly acquired rights. Some hoped to get themselves elected to political office. Some came to make their fortunes by acquiring farmland or by starling new businesses. However, some came for reasons of pure greed or fraud, Horace Greeley the editor of the New York Tribune, wrote that such carpetbaggers were “stealing and plundering, many of them

with both arms around the Negroes, and their hands in their rear pockets, seeing if they cannot pick a paltry dollar out ofthem."

And here is the paragraph on "scalawags":

Some of these native-born southerners had the best of motives. Having opposed slavery and secession, they had sympathized with the Union during the war. Now they believed that the best way to restore peace and prosperity to the South and to the nation was to forgive and forget. However, others were selfish and ambitious individuals who seized any opportunity to advance their own fortunes at the expense of their neighbors.

The new treatment is kinder. The authors are trying to be positive about white Republicans, even if they cannot resist ending each paragraph by invoking greed. Of course, textbook authors might use the notion of private gain to disparage every textbook hero from Christopher Columbus and the Pilgrims through George Washington to Jackie Robinson. They don't, though. Textbooks attribute selfish motives only to characters with whom they have little sympathy, such as the idealists in Reconstruction, The negatives then stick in the mind, cemented by the catchy pejoratives carpetbaggers and scalawags, while the qualifying phrases"some sincerely wanted ..."are likely to be forgotten. No textbook introduces us to idealists such as Edmonia Highgate, facing down white violence, or Robert Flournoy, casting his lot with black Republicans because he believed in justice. Everyone who supported black rights in the South during Reconstruction did so at personal risk. At the beginning of Reconstruction, simply to walk to school to teach could be life-threatening. Toward the end of the era, there were communities in which simply to vote Republican was life-threatening. While some Reconstructionists undoubtedly achieved economic gain, it was a dangerous way to make a buck. Textbooks need to show the risk, and the racial idealism that prompted most of the people who took it,

Instead, textbooks deprive us of our racial idealists, from Highgate and Flournoy, whom they omit, through Brown, whom they make fanatic, to Lincoln, whose idealism they flatten. In the course of events, Lincoln would come to accomplish on a national scale what Brown tried to accomplish at Harpers Ferry: helping African Americans mobilize to fight slavery. Finally, like John Brown, Abraham

Lincoln became a martyr and a hero. Seven million Americans, almost one-third of the entire Union population, stood to watch his funeral train pass,73 African Americans mourned with particular intensity. Gideon Welles, secretary of the navy, walked the streets of Washington at dawn an hour before the president breaihed his last and described the scene: “The colored people especiallyand there were at this time more of them perhaps, than of whiteswere overwhelmed with grief.” Welles went on to tell how all day long “on the avenue in from ofthe White House were several hundred black people, mostly women and children, weeping for their loss,“ a crowd that ”did not appear to diminish through the whole of that cold, wet day” In their grief African Americans were neither misguided nor childlike. When the hour came for dealing with slavery, as Lincoln had surmised, he had done his duty and it had cost his life.74 Abraham Lincoln, racism and all, was blacks' legitimate hero, as earlier John Brown had been. In a sense, Brown and Lincoln were even killed for the same deed: arming black people for their own liberation. People around the world mourned the passing of both men,

Bui when I ask ray (white) college students on the first day of class who their heroes are in American history, only one or two in a hundred pick Lincoln,“ Even those who choose Lincoln know only that he was ”really great"they don't know why. Their ignorance makes sense-after all, textbooks present Abraham Lincoln almost devoid of content. No students choose John Brown. Not one has ever named a white abolitionist, a Reconstruction JOHN BROWN AND ABRAHAM LINCOL/S Republican, or a civil rights martyr. Yet these same students feel sympathy with America's struggle to improve race relations. Among their more popular choices are African Americans, from Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass to Rosa Parks and Malcolm X.

While John Brown was on trial, the abolitionist Wendell Phillips spoke of Brown's place in history. Phillips foresaw that slavery was a cause whose time was passing, and he asked “the American people” of the future, when slavery was long dead in “the civilization of the twentieth century,” this question: “When that day comes, what will be thought ofthese first martyrs, who teach us how to live and how to die?”7fi Phillips meant the question rhetorically. He never dreamed that Americans would take no pleasure in those who had helped lead the nation to abolish slavery, or that

textbooks would label Brown's small band misguided if not fanatic and Brown himself possibly mad.

Antiracism is one of America's great gifts to the world. Its relevance extends far beyond race relations. Antiracism led to "a new birth of freedom" after the Civil War, and not only for African Americans. Twice, once in each century, the movement for black rights triggered the movement for women's rights. Twice it reinvigorated our democratic spirit, which had been atrophying. Throughout the world, from South Africa to Northern Ireland, movements of oppressed people continue to use tactics and words borrowed from our aboliIn Vicksburg, Mississippi, these African Americans gathered at the courthouse to hear the news of Lincoln's death confirmed, to express their grief, and perhaps to seek pro tection in the face of an uncertain future.

tionist and civil rights movements. The clandestine early meetings of anticommunists in East Germany were marked by singing "We Shall Overcome." Iranians used nonviolent methods borrowed from Thoreau and Martin Luther King, Jr., to overthrow their hated shah. On Ho Chi Minh's desk in Hanoi on the day he died lay a biography ofJohn Brown. Among the heroes whose ideas inspired the students in Tienanmen Square and whose words spilled from their lips was Abraham Lincoln.78 Yet we in America, whose antiracist idealists are admired around the globe, seem (o have lost these men and women as heroes. Our textbooks need to present them in such a way that we might again value our own idealism.

JOHN BROWN AND ABRAHAM LINCOLN .

Labor is prior to, and independent of, capital. Capital is only the fruit of labor, and could never have existed if labor had not first existed. Labor is the superior of capital, and deserves much the higher consideration.

Abraham Lincoln I had. once believed that we were all masters of our fatethat we could mould our lives into any form we pleased. . . . I had overcome deafness and blindness sufficiently to be happy, and I supposed that anyone could corne out victorious if he threw himself valiantly into life's struggle. But as I went more and more about the country I learned that I had spoken with assurance on a subject I knew little about. ... I learned that the power to rise in the world is not within the reach of everyone.

Helen Keller Ten men in our country could buy the whole world and ten million can't buy enough to eat.

Will Rogers, 1 The history of a nation is, unfortunately, too easily written as the history of its dominant class,

Kwame Nkrumah

Lies My Teacher Told Me

7. The Land of Opportunity

High school students have eyes, ears, and television sets {all too many have their own TV sets), so they know a lot about relative privilege in America. They measure their family's social position against that of other families, and their community's position against other communities. Middle-class students, especially, know little about how the American class structure works, however, and nothing at all about how it has changed over time. These students do not leave high school merely ignorant of the workings of the class structure; they come out as terrible sociologists. “Why are people poor?” I have asked first-year college students. Or, if their own class position is one of relative privilege, “Why is your family well off?” The answers I've received, to characterize them chari tably, are half-formed and naive. The students blame the poor for not being successful.4 They have no understanding of the ways that opportunity is not equal in America and no notion that social structure pushes people around, influencing the ideas they hold and the lives they fashion.

High school history textbooks can take some of the credit for this state of affairs. Some textbooks cover certain high points of labor history, such as the 1894 Pullman strike near Chicago that President Cleveland broke with federal troops, or the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist fire that killed 146 women in New York City, but the most recent event mentioned in most books Is the Taft-Hartley Act of fifty years ago. No book mentions the Hormel meat-packers' strike in the mid-1980s or the air traffic controllers strike broken by President Reagan. Nor do textbooks describe any continuing issues facing labor, such as the growth of multinational corporations and their exporting ofjobs overseas. With such omissions, textbook authors can construe labor history as something that happened long ago, like slavery, and that, like slavery, was corrected long ago. It logically follows that unions appear anachronistic. The idea that they might be necessary in order for workers to have a voice in the workplace goes unstated. Textbooks' treatments of events in labor history are never anchored in any analysis of social

class,5 This amounts to delivering the footnotes instead of the This photograph of a sweatshop in New York's Chinatown, taken in the early 1990s, illustrates that the working class still works in America, under conditions not so dif ferent from a century ago, often in the same locations.

lecture! Six of Che dozen high school American history textbooks I examined contain no index listing at all for “social class,” “social stratification,11 ”class structure,“ ”income distribution,“ ”inequality,“ or any conceivably related topic. Not one book lists ”upper class,“ ”working class,“ or ”lower class.“ Two of the textbooks list ”middle class,“ but only to assure students that America is a middle class country, ”Except for slaves, most of the colonists were members of the 'middling ranks,'“ says Land ofPromise, and nails home the point that we are a middle-class country by asking students to ”Describe three 'middle-class' values that united free Americans of all classes.“ Several of the textbooks note the explosion of middle-class suburbs after World War II. Talking about the middle class is hardly equivalent to discussing social stratification, however; in fact, as Gregory Mantsios has pointed out, ”such references appear to be acceptable precisely because they mute class differences."

Stressing how middle-class we all are is particularly problematic today, because the proportion of households earning between 75 percent and 125 percent of the median income has fallen steadily since 1967. The Reagan-Bush administrations accelerated this shrinkage of the middle class, and most families who left its ranks fell rather than rose,7 This is the kind of historical trend one would think history books would take as appropriate subject matter, but only four of the twelve books in my sample provide any analysis of social stratification in the United Stales. Even these fragmentary analyses are set mostly in colonial America. Land ofPromise lives up to its reassuring title by heading its discussion of social class “Social Mobility.” “One great difference between colonial and European society was that the colonists had more social mobility,” echoes TheAmerican Tradition. “In contrast with contemporary Europe, eighteenthcentury America was a shining (and of equality and opportunity-with the notorious exception of slavery,” chimes in The American Pageant. Although The Challenge of freedom identifies three social classesupper, middle, and lower among whites in colonial society, compared to Europe “there was greater social mobility”

Never mind that the most violent class conflicts in American historyBacon's Rebellion and Shays's Rebelliontook place in and just after colonial times. Textbooks still say that colonial society was relatively classless and marked by upward mobility And things have gotten rosier since. “By 1815,” The Challenge ofFreedom assures us, two classes had withered away and “America was a country of middle class people and of middle class goals.” This book returns repeatedly, at intervals of every' fifty years or so, to the theme of how open opportunity is in America. “In the years after 1945, social mobilitymovement from one social class to anotherbecame more widespread in America,” Challenge concludes, “This meant that people had a better chance to move upward in society” The stress on upward mobility is striking. There is almost nothing in any of these textbooks about class inequalities or barriers of any kind to social mobility. “What conditions made it possible for poor white immigrants to become richer in the colonies?” Land ofPromise asks. “What conditions made/ make it difficult?” goes unasked. Textbook authors thus present an America in which, as preachers were fond of saying in the nineteenth century, men start from “humble origins” and aitain “the most elevated positions.”

Sodal class is probably the single most important variable in society. From womb to tomb, it correlates with almost all other social characteristics ofpeople that we can measure. Affluent expectant mothers are more likely to get prenatal care, receive current medical advice, and enjoy general health, fitness, and nutrition. Many poor and working-class mothers-to-be first contact the medical profession in the last month, sometimes the last hours, of their pregnancies. Rich babies come out healthier and weighing more than poor babies. The infants go home to very different situations. Poor babies are more likely to have high levels of poisonous lead in their environments and their bodies. Rich babies get more time and verbal interaction with their parents and higher quality day care when not with their parents. When they enter kindergarten, and through the twelve years that follow, rich children benefit from suburban schools that spend two to three times as much money per student as schools in inner cities or impoverished rural areas. Poor children are taught in classes that are often 50 percent larger than the classes of affluent children. Differences such as these help account for the higher school-dropout rate among poor children.

Even when poor children are fortunate enough to attend the same school as rich children, they encounter teachers who expect only children of affluent families to know the right answers. Social science research shows that teachers are often surprised and even distressed when poor children excel. Teachers and counselors believe they can predict who is “college material,” Since many working-class children give off the wrong signals, even in first grade, they end up in the “general education” track in high school “If you are the child of lowincome parents, the chances are good that you will receive limited and often careless attention from adults in your high school,” in the words of Theodore Sizer's best-selling study of American high schools, Horace's Compromise. “If you are the child of upper-middie-income parents, the chances are good that you will receive substantial and careful attention,”111 Researcher Reba Page has provided vivid accounts of how high school American history courses use rote learning to turn off lower-class students.“ Thus schools have put into practice Woodrow Wilson's recommendation: ”We want one class of persons to have a liberal education, and we want another class of persons, a very much larger class of necessity in every society, to forgo the privilege of a liberal education and fit themselves to perform specific difficult manual tasks."IJ As if this unequal home and school life were not enough, rich teenagers then enroll in the Princeton Review or other coaching sessions for the Scholastic Aptitude Test. Even without coaching, affluent children are advantaged because their background is similar to that of the testmakers, so they are tH&/

comfortable with the vocabulary and subtle subcultural assumptions of the test. To no one's surprise, social class correlates strongly with SAT scores.

All these are among the reasons why social class predicts the rate of college attendance and the type of college chosen more effectively than does any other factor, including intellectual ability, however measured. After college, most affluent children get white-collar jobs, most working-class children get blue-collar jobs, and the class differences continue. As adults, rich people are more likely to have hired an attorney and to be a member of formal organizations that increase their civic power. Poor people are more likely to watch TV. Because affluent families can save some money while poor families must spend what they make, wealth

differences are ten times larger than income differences. Therefore most poor and working-class families cannot accumulate the down payment required to buy a house, which in turn shuts them out from our most important tax shelter, the writeoff of home mortgage interest. Working-class parents cannot afford to live in elite subdivisions or hire high-quality day care, so the process of educational inequality replicates itself in the next generation. Finally, affluent Americans also have longer life expectancies than lowerand working-class people, the largest single cause of which is better access to health care.13 Echoing the results of Helen Keller's study of blindness, research has determined that poor health is not distributed randomly about the social structure but is concentrated in the lower class. Social Security then becomes a huge transfer system, using monies contributed by all Americans to pay benefits disproportionately to longer-lived affluent Americans.

Ultimately, social class determines how people think about social class. When asked if poverty in America is the fault of the poor or the fault of the system, 57 percent of business leaders blamed the poor; just 9 percent blamed the system. Labor leaders showed sharply reversed choices: only 15 percent said the poor were at fault while 56 percent blamed the system. (Some replied “don't know” or chose a middle position.) The largest single difference between our two main political parties lies in how their members think about social class: 55 percent of Republicans blamed the poor for their poverty, while only 13 percent blamed the system for it; 68 percent of Democrats, on the other hand, blamed the system, while only 5 percent blamed the poor.

Few of these statements are news, I know, which is why I have not documented most of them, but the majority of high school students do not know or understand these ideas. Moreover, the processes have changed over time, for [he class structure in America today is not the same as it was in 1890, let alone in colonial America. Yet in Land of Promise, for example, social class goes unmentioned after 1670.

Many teachers compound the problem by avoiding talking about social class. Recent interviews with teachers “revealed that they had a much broader knowledge of the economy, both academically and experientially than they admitted in class.” Teachers "expressed fear that students might find out about the Beer is one of the few products (pickup trucks, some patent medicines, and false-teeth cleansers are others)

that advertisers try to sell with working-class images. Advertisers use upper-mid dieclass imagery to sell most items, from wine to nylons to toilet-bowl cleansers. Signs of social class cover these two models, from footwear to headgear. Note who has the newspaper, briefcase, lunchOox, and, in a final statement, the cans and the bottles.

injustices and inadequacies oftheir economic and political institutions,“15 By never blaming the system, American history courses thus present ”Republican history." Historically, social class is intertwined with all kinds of events and processes in our past. Our governing system was established by rich men, following theories that emphasized government as a bulwark of the propertied class. Although rich himself, James Madison worried about social inequality and wrote The Federalist #10 to explain how the proposed government would not succumb to the influence of the affluent. Madison did not fully succeed, according to Edward Pessen, who examined the social-class backgrounds of all American presidents through Reagan. Pessen found that more than 40 percent hailed from the upper class, mostly from the upper fringes of that elite group, and another 15 percent originated in families located between the upper and upper-middle classes. More than 25 percent came from a solid upper-middle-class background, leaving just six presidents, or 15 percent, to come from the middle and lowermiddle classes and just one, Andrew Johnson, representing any part of the lower class. For good reason, Pessen titled his book The Log, Cabin Myth111 While it was sad when the great ship Titanic went down, as the old song refrain goes, it was saddest for the lower classes: among women, only 4 of 143 first-class passengers were lost, while 15 of 93 second-class passengers drowned, along with 81 of 179 third-class women and girls. The crew ordered third-class passengers to remain below deck, holding some of them there at gunpoint.17 More recently,

social class played a major role in determining who fought in the Vietnam War: sons of the affluent won educational and medical deferments through most of the conflict.13 Textbooks and teachers ignore all this.

Teachers may avoid social class out of a laudable desire not to embarrass their charges. If so, rheir concern is misguided. When my students from nonaffluent backgrounds learn about the class system, they find the experience liberating. Once they see the social processes that have

helped keep their families poor, they can let go of their negative self-image about being poor. If to understand is to pardon, for working-class children to understand how stratification works is to pardon themselves and their families. Knowledge of the social-class system also reduces the tendency of Americans from other social classes to blame the victim for being poor. Pedagogicslly, stratification provides a gripping learning experience. Students are fascinated to discover how the upper class wields disproportionate power relating to everything from energy bills in Congress to zoning decisions in small towns.

Consider a white ninth-grade student taking American history in a predominantly middle-class town in Vermont. Her father tapes Sheetrock, earning an income that in slow construction seasons leaves the family quite poor. Her mother helps out by driving a school bus part-time, in addition to taking care of her two younger siblings. The girl lives with her family in a small house, a winterized former summer cabin, while most of her classmates live in large suburban homes. How is this girl to understand her poverty? Since history textbooks present the American past as 390 years of progress and portray our society as a land of opportunity in which folks get what they deserve and deserve what they get, the failures of working-class Americans to transcend their class origin inevitably get laid at their own doorsteps,

Within the white working-class community the girl will probably find few resources-teachers, church parishioners, family memberswho can tell her of heroes or struggles among people of her background, for, except in pockets of continuing class conflict, the working class usually forgets its own history. More than any other group, white working-class students believe that they deserve their low status, A subculture of shame results. This negative selfimage is foremost among what Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb have called “the hidden injuries ofclass.” Several years ago, two students ofmine provided a demonstration: they drove around Burlington, Vermont, in a big, nearly new, shiny black American car (probably a Lexus would be more appropriate today) and then in a battered ten-year-old subcompact. In each vehicle, when they reached a stoplight and it turned green, they waited until they were honked at before driving on. Motorists averaged less than seven seconds to honk at them in the subcompact, but in the luxury car the

students enjoyed 13.2 seconds before anyone honked. Besides providing a good reason to buy a luxury car, this experiment shows how Americans unconsciously grant respect to the educated and successful. Since motorists of all social stations honked at the subcompact more readily, working-class drivers were in a sense disrespecting themselves while deferring to their betters. The biting quip “If you're so smart, why aren't you rich?” conveys the injury done to the self-image of the poor when the idea that America is a meritocracy goes unchallenged in school.

Part of the problem is that American history textbooks describe American education itself as meritocratic. A huge body of research confirms that education is dominated by the class structure and operates to replicate that structure in the next generation.20 Meanwhile, history textbooks blithely tell of such federal largesse to education as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, passed under Pres. Lyndon Johnson. Not one textbook offers any data on or analysis of inequality within educational institutions. None mentions how school districts in low-income areas labor under financial constraints so shocking that Jonathan Kozol calls them “savage inequalities.”21 No textbook ever suggests that students might research the history of their own school and the population it serves. The only two textbooks that relate education to the class system at all see it as a remedy! Schooling “was a key to upward mobility in postwar America,” in the words of The Challenge ofFreedom The tendency ofteachers and textbooks to avoid social class as ifit were a dirty little secret only reinforces the reluctance of working-class families to talk about it. Paul Cowan has told of interviewing the children of Italian immigrant workers involved in the famous 1912 Lawrence, Massachusetts, mill strike. He spoke with the daughter of one of the Lawrence workers who testified at a Washington congressional hearing investigating the strike. The worker, Camella Teoli, then thirteen years old, had been scalped by a cotton-twisting machine just before the strike and had been hospitalized for several months. Her testimony “became front-page news all over America.” But Teoli's daughter, interviewed in 1976 after her mother's death, could not help Cowan. Her mother had told her nothing of the incident, nothine of her trip to Washington,

f &CQ nothing about her impact on America's conscienceeven though almost every day, the daughter “had

combed her mother's hair into a bun that disguised the bald spot." A professional of working-class origin told me a similar story about being ashamed of her uncle "for being a steelworker." A certain defensiveness is built into working-class culture; even its successful acts of working-class resislance, like the Lawrence strike, necessarily presuppose lower status and income, hence connote a certain inferiority. If" the larger community is so good, as textbooks tell us it is, then celebrating or even passing on the memory of conflict with it seems somehow disloyal.

Textbooks do present immigrant history. Around the turn of the century immigrants dominated the American urban working class, even in cities as distant from seacoasts as Des Moines and Louisville. When more than 70 percent ofthe white population was native stock, less than 10 percent of the urban working class was.JJ But when textbooks tell the immigrant story, they emphasize Joseph Pulitzer, Andrew Carnegie, and their ilkimmigrants who made supergood. Several textbooks apply the phrases rags to riches or land of opportunity to the immigrant experience. Such legendary successes were achieved, to be sure, but they were the exceptions, not the rule. Ninety-five percent of the executives and financiers in America around the turn of the century came from upper-class or upper-middle-class backgrounds. Fewer than 3 percent sratted as poor immigrants or farm children. Throughout the nineteenth century, just 2 percent of American industrialists came from working-class origins." By concentrating on the inspiring exceptions, textbooks present immigrant history as another heartening confirmation of America as the land of unparalleled opportunity.

Again and again, textbooks emphasize how America has differed from Europe in having less class stratification and more economic and social mobility. This is another aspect of the archetype of American except!onalism: our society has been uniquely fair. Jt would never occur to historians In, say, France or Australia, to claim that their society was exceptionally equalitarian. Does this treatment of the United States prepare students for reality? It certainly does not accurately describe our country today Social scientists have on many occasions compared the degree of economic equality in the United State? with that in other industrial nations. Depending on the measure used, the United States has ranked sixth of six, seventh of seven, ninth of twelve, or

fourteenth of fourteen." In the United States the tichest fifth of the population earns eleven times as much income as the poorest fifth, one of the highest ratios in the industrialized world: in Great Britain the ratio is seven to one, in Japan just four to one.27 In Japan the avetage chief executive officer in an automobile-manufacturing firm makes 20 times as much as the average worker in an automobile assembly plant; in the United States he (and it is not she) makes 192 times as much.28 The Jeffersonian conceit ofa nation ofindependent farmers and merchants is also long gone: only one working American in thirteen is self-employed, compared to one in eight in Western Europe.29 Thus not only do we have far fewer independent entrepreneurs compared to two hundred years ago, we have fewer compared to Europe today.

Since textbooks claim that colonial America was radically less stratified than Europe, they should tell clieir readers when inequality set in. It surely was not a recent development By 1910 the top 1 percent ofthe United States population received more than a third of all personal income, while the bottom fifth got less than one-eighth.50 This level of inequality was on a par with that in Germany or Great Britain. If textbooks acknowledged inequality, then they could describe the changes in our class structure over time, which would introduce their students to fascinating historical debate,

For example, some historians argue that wealth in colonial society was more equally distributed than it is today and that economic inequality increased during the presidency of Andrew Jacksona period known, ironically, as the age ofthe common man. Others believe that the flowering ofthe large corporation in the late nineteenth century made the class structure more rigid. Walter Dean Burnham has argued that the Republican presidential victory in 1896 (McKinley over Bryan) brought about a sweeping political realignment that changed “a fairly democratic regime into a rather broadly based oligarchy,” so by the 1920s business controlled public policy.35 Clearly the gap between rich and poor, like the distance between blacks and whites, was greater at the end of the Progressive Era in 1920 than at its beginning around 1890.H The story is not all one of increasing stratification, for between the depression and the end of World War II income and wealth in America gradually became more equal. Distributions of income then remained reasonably constant until President Reagan took office in

1981, when inequality began to grow.1 Still other scholars think that little change has occurred since the Revolution. Lee Sokow, for example, finds “surprising inequality of wealth and income” in America in 1798. At least for Boston, Stephan Thernstrom concludes that inequalities in life chances owing to social class show an eerie continuity.36 All this is part of American history. But it is not part of American history as taught in high school.

To social scientists, the level of inequality is a portentous thing to know about a society. When we rank countries by this variable, we find Scandinavian nations at the top, the most equal, and agricultural societies like Colombia and India near the bottom. The policies of the Reagan and Bush administrations, which openly favored the rich, abetted a secular trend already in motion, causing inequality to increase measurably between 1981 and 1992. For the United States to move perceptibly toward Colombia in social inequality is a development of no small import." Surely high school students would be interested to learn that in 1950 physicians made two and s. half times what unionized industrial workers made but now make six times as much. Surely they need to understand that top managers of clothing firms, who used to earn fifty times what their American employees made, now make 1,500 times what their Malaysian workers earn. Surely it is wrong for our history textbooks and teachers to withhold the historical information that might prompt and inform discussion of these trends.

Why might they commit such a blunder? First and foremost, publisher censorship of textbook authors. “You always run the risk, if you talk about social class, of being labeled Marxist,” the editor for social studies and history 3t one of the biggest publishing houses told me. This editor communicates the taboo, formally or subtly to every writer she works with, and she implied that most other editors do too.

Publisher pressure derives in part from textbook adoption boards and committees in states and school districts. These are subject in turn to pressure from organized groups and individuals who appear before them. Perhaps the most robust such lobby is Educational Research Analysts, led by Mel Gabler of Texas. Gabler's stable of right-wing critics regards even alleging that a textbook contains some class analysis as a devastating criticism. As one writer has put it, “Formulating issues in terms of class is unacceptable, perhaps even un-

American.” Fear of not winning adoption in Texas is a prime source of publisher angst, and might help explain why Life and Liberty limits its social-class analysis to colonial times in England1. By contrast, “the colonies were places of great opportunity,” even back then. Some Texans cannot easily be placated, however. Deborah L. Brezina, a Gabler ally, complained to the Texas textbook board that Life and Liberty describes America “as an unjust society,” unfair to lower economic groups, and therefore should not be approved.w Such pressure is hardly new. Harold Rugg's Introduction to Problem ofAmerican Culture and his popular history textbook, written during the depression, included some class analysis. In the early 1940s, according to Frances FitzGerald, the National Association of Manufacturers attacked Rugg's books, partly for this feature, and “brought to an end” social and economic analysis in American history textbooks.

More often the influence of the upper class is less direct. The most potent rationale for class privilege in American history has been Social Darwinism, an archetype that still has great power in American culture. The notion that people rise and fall in a survival of the fittest may not conform to the data on intergenerational mobility in the United States, but that has hardly caused the archetype to fade away from American education, particularly from American history classes. Facts that do not fit with the archetype, such as the entire literature of social stratification, simply get left out.

Textbook authors may not even need pressure from publishers, the right wing, the upper class, or cultural archetypes to avoid social stratification. As part of the process of heroification, textbook authors treat America itself as a hero, indeed as the hero of their books, so they remove its warts. Even to report the facts of income and wealth distribution might seem critical of America the hero, for it is difficult to come up with a theory of social justice that can explain why 1 percent of the population controls almost 40 percent of the wealth. Could the other 99 percent of us be that lazy or otherwise undeserving? To go on to include some of the mechanismsunequal schooling and the likeby which the upper class stays upper would clearly involve criticism of our beloved nation.

For any or all of these reasons, textbooks minimize social stratification. They then do something less comprehensible: they fail to explain the benefits of free enterprise. Writing about an earlier generation of textbooks, Frances FitzGerald

pointed out that the books ignored “the virtues as well as the vices of their own economic system.”42 Teachers might mention free enterprise with respect, but seldom do the words become more than a slogan,45 This omission is strange, for capitalism has its advantages, after all. Basketball star Michael Jordan, Chrysler executive Lee lacocca, and ice-cream makers Ben and Jerry all got rich by supplying goods and services that people desired. To be sure, much social stratification cannot be justified so neatly, because it results from the abuse ofwealth and power by those who have these advantages to shut out those who do not. As a social and economic order, the capitalist system offers much to criticize but also much to praise. America is a land of opportunity for many people. And for all the distortions capitalism imposes upon it, democracy also benefits from the separation of power between public and private spheres. Our history textbooks never touch on these benefits.

Publishers or those who influence them have evidently concluded that what American society needs to stay strong is citizens who assent to its social structure and economic system without thought. As a consequence, today's textbooks defend our economic system mindlessly, with insupportable pieties about its unique lack of stratification; thus they produce alumni of American history courses unable to criticize or defend our system of social stratification knowledgeably.

But isn't it nice simply to believe that America is equal? Maybe the “land of opportunity” archetype is an empowering mythmaybe believing in it might even help make it come true. For ifstudents think the sky is the limit, they may reach for the sky, while if they don't, they won't.

The analogy of gender points to the problem with this line of thought. How could high school girls understand their place in American history iftheir textbooks told them that, from colonial America to the present, women have had equal opportunity for upward mobility and political participation? How could they then explain why no woman has been president? Girls would have to infer, perhaps unconsciously, that it has been their own gender's fault, a conclusion that is hardly empowering.

Textbooks do tell how women were denied the right to vote in many states until 1920 and faced other barriers to upward mobility. Textbooks also tell of barriers confronting racial minorities. The final question Land of Promise asks

students following its “Social Mobility” section is “What social barriers prevented blacks, Indians, and women from competing on an equal basis with white male colonists?” After its passage extolling upward mobility. The Challenge of Freedom notes, “Not all people, however, enjoyed equal rights or an equal chance to improve their way oflifc,” and goes on to address the issues ofsexism and racism. But neither here nor anywhere else do Promise or Challenge (or most other textbooks) hint that opportunity might not be equal today for white Americans of the lower and working classes,44 Perhaps as a result, even business leaders and Republicans, the respondents statistically most likely to engage in what sociologists call “blaming the victim,” blame the social system rather than African Americans for black poverty and blame the system rather than women for the latter's unequal achievement in the workplace. In sum, affluent Americans, like their textbooks, are willing to credit racial discrimination as the cause of poverty among blacks and Indians and sex discrimination as the cause ofwomen's inequality but don't see class discrimination as the cause ofpoverty in general.

More than math or science, more even than American literature, courses in American history hold the promise oftelling high school students how they and their parents, their communities, and their society came to be as they are. One way things are is unequal by social class. Although poor and working-class children usually cannot identify the cause of their alienation, history often turns them off because it justifies rather than explains the present. When these students react by dropping out, intellectually if not physically, their poor school performance helps convince them as well as their peers in the faster tracks that the system is meritocratic and that they themselves lack merit. Zn the end, the absence of social-class analysis in American history courses amounts to one more way that education in America is rigged against the working class.

The historian must have no country.

What did you learn in school today, dear little boy of mine? I learned our government must be strong. It's always right and never wrong. . . .

That's what I learned in school.

Jo/in Quincy Adams We have to face the unpleasant as well as the affirmative side of the human story, including our own story as a nation, our own stories of our peoples. We

have got to have the ugly facts in order to protect us from the official view of reality.

Bin Meyers3 As long as you are convinced you have never done anything, you can never do anything.

Malcolm X To study foreign affairs without putting ourselves into others' shoes is to deal in illusion and to prepare students for a lifelong misunderstanding of our place in the world.

PaulGagnon Song by Tom Paxton, 1963s

Lies My Teacher Told Me

8. Watching Big Brother: What Textbooks Teach about the...

Some traditional historians, critics ofthe new emphasis on social and cultural history, believe that American history textbooks have been seduced from their central narrative, which they see as the story of the American state.

Methinks they protest too much. The expanded treatments that textbooks now give to women, slavery, modes of transportation, developments in popular music, and other topics not directly related to the state have yet to produce a new core narrative. Therefore they appear as unnecessary diversions that only interrupt the basic narrative that the textbooks still tell: the history of the American government. Two ofthe twelve textbooks I studied were “inquiry” textbooks, assembled from primary sources. They no longer make the story of the state quite so central," The ten narrative textbooks in my sample continue to pay overwhelming attention to the actions of the executive branch of the federal government. They still demarcate US. history as a series of presidential administrations.

Thus, for instance, Land ofPromise grants each president a biographical vignette, even William Henry Harrison {who served for one month), but never mentions arguably our greatest composer, Charles Ives; our most influential architect, Frank Lloyd Wright; or our most prominent non-Indian humanitarian on behalf of Indians, Helen Hunt Jackson, Although textbook authors include more social history than they used to, they still regard the actions and words of the state as incomparably more important than what the American people were doing, listening to, sleeping in. living through, or thinking about. Particularly for the centuries before the Woodrow Wilson administration, this stress on the state is inappropriate, because the federal executive was not nearly as important then as now.

What story do textbooks tell about our government? First, they imply that the state we live in today is the state created in 1789. Textbook authors overlook the possibility that the balance of powers set forth in the Constitution, granting some power to each branch of the federal government, some to the states, and reserving some for individuals, has been decisively altered over the last two hundred years. The federal government they picture is still the people's servant, manageable and tractable. Paradoxically, textbooks then underplay the role of

nongovernmental institutions or private citizens in bringing about improvements in the environment, race relations, education, and other social issues. In short, textbook authors portray a heroic state, and, like their other heroes, this one is pretty much without blemishes. Such an approach converts textbooks into anticitizenship manualshandbooks for acquiescence.

Perhaps the best way to show textbooks' sycophancy is by examining how authors treat the government when its actions have been least defensible. Let us begin with considerations relating to U.S. foreign policy.

College courses in political science generally take one of two approaches when analyzing U.S, actions abroad. Some professors and textbooks are quite critical of what might be called the American colossus. In this “American century,” the United States has been the most powerful nation on earth and has typically acted to maintain its hegemony. This view holds that we Americans abandoned our revolutionary ideology long ago, if indeed we ever held one, and now typically act to repress the legitimate attempts at self-determination of other nations and peoples.

More common is the realpolitik view. George Kennan, who for almost half a century has been an architect of and commentator on U.S. foreign policy, provided a succinct statement of this approach in 1948. As head of the Policy Planning Staffofthe State Department, Kennan wrote in a now famous memorandum:

We have about 50% of the world's wealth but only 6,3% of its population. In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real test in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity. We need not deceive ourselves that we can afford today the luxury of altruism and world benefactionunreal objectives such as human rights, the raising ofliving standards, and democratization.

Under this view, the historian or political scientist proceeds by identifying American national interests as articulated by policymakers in the past as well as by historians today. Then s/he analyzes our acts and policies to assess the degree to which they furthered these interests.

High school American history textbooks do not, of course, adopt or even hint at the American colossus view. Unfortunately, they also omit the realpolitik approach. Instead, they take a strikingly different tack. They see our policies as part of a morality play in which the United States typically acts on behalf of human rights, democracy, and “the American way.” When

Americans have done wrong, according to this view, it has been because others misunderstood us, or perhaps because we misunderstood the situation. But always our motives were good. This approach might be called the “international good guy” view.

Textbooks do not indulge in any direct discussion of what “good” is or might mean. In Frances FitzGerald's phrase, textbooks present the United States as “a kind of Salvation Army to the rest of the world.”8 In so doing, they echo the nation our leaders like to present to its citizens: the supremely1 moral, disinterested peacekeeper, the supremely responsible world citizen. “Other countries look to their own interests,” said Pres. John F. Kennedy in 1961, pridefully invoking what he termed our “obligations” around the globe. “Only the United Statesand we are only six percent of the world's populationbears this kind of burden.”9 Since at least the 1920s, textbook authors have claimed that the United States is more generous than any other nation in the world in providing foreign aid.10 The myth was untrue then; it is likewise untrue now. Today at least a dozen European and Arab nations devote much larger proportions of their gross domestic product (GDP) or total governmental expenditures to foreign aid than does the United States.

The desire to emphasize our humanitarian dealings with the world influences what textbook authors choose to include and omit. All but one of the twelve textbooks contain at least a paragraph on the Peace Corps. The tone of these treatments is adoring. “The Peace Corps made friends for America everywhere,” gushes Life and Liberty. Triumph of eke American Nation infers our larger purpose: “The Peace Corps symbolized America's desire to provide humane assistance as well as economic and military leadership in the non-Communist world.” As a shaper of history, however, the Peace Corps has been insignificant. It does not disparage this fine institution to admit chat its main impact has been on the intellectual development of its own volunteers.

More important and often less affable American exports are our multinational corporations. One multinational alone, International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT), which took the lead in prompting our government to destabilize the socialist government of Salvador Allende, had more impact on Chile than all the Peace Corps workers America ever sent there. The same might be said of Union Carbide in India and United Fruit in Guatemala, By influencing U.S. government policies, other American-based multinationals have had even more profound effects on other nations.11 At times the corporations' influence

has been constructive. For example, when Pres. Gerald Ford was trying to perWATCHIMG BIG BROTHER

Textbook authors select images to reinforce the idea that our country's rnain role in the world is to bring about good. This photograph from Life arid Liberty shows “a Peace Corps volunteer teaching in Botswana.”

suade Congress to support U.S. military intervention on behalf of the UNITA rebels in Angola's civil war, Gulf Oil lobbied against intervention. Gulf was happily producing oil in partnership with Angola's Marxist government when it found its refineries coming under fire from American arms in the hands of UNITA. At other times, multinationals have persuaded our government to intervene when only their corporate interest, not our national interest, was at stake.

All this is a matter of grave potential concern to students, who after graduation may get drafted and then sent to fight in a foreign country, partly because U.S. policy has been unduly influenced by some Delaware corporation or New York bank. Or students may find their jobs eliminated by multinationals that move factories to Third World countries whose citizens must work for almost nothing.n Social scientists used to describe the world as stratified into a wealthy industrialized center and a poor colonialized periphery; some now hold that multinationals and faster modes of transportation and communication have made management the new center, workers at home and abroad the new periphery. Even if students are not personally affected, they will have to deal with the multinationalization of the world. As multinational corporations such as Exxon and Mitsubishi come to have budgets larger than those of most governments, national economies are becoming obsolete, Robert Reich, secretary of labor in the Clinton administration, has pointed out, “The very idea of an American economy is becoming meaningless, as are the notions of an American corporation, American capital, American products, and American technology.”14 Multinationals may represent a threat to national autonomy, affecting not only small nations but also the United States.

When Americans try to think through the issues raised by the complex interweaving of our economic and political interests, they will not be helped by what they learned in their American history courses. History textbooks do not even mention multinationals. The topic doesn't fit their “international good guy” approach. Only American Adventures even lists “multinationals” in its index, and its treatment consists of a Single sentence: “These investments [in Europe after World War I] led to

the development of multinational corporationslarge companies with interests in several countries," Even this lone statement is inaccurate: European multinationals date back centuries, and American multinationals have played an important role in pur history since at least 1900.

Textbooks might begin discussing the influence of multinational corporations on U.S. foreign policy with the administration of Woodrow Wilson. Pressure from First National Bank of New York helped prompt Wilson's intervention in Haiti. U.S. interests owned more of Mexico than interests from anywhere else, including Mexico itself, which helps explain Wilson's repeated invasions of that country. In Russia the new communist government nationalized all petroleum assets; as a consequence, Standard Oil of New Jersey was "the major impetus" behind American opposition to the Bolsheviks.

Textbooks mystify these circumstances, however. The closest they come to telling the story of economic influences on our foreign policy is in passages such as this, from The Challenge of Freedom, regarding Wilson's interventions in Mexico: "Many Americans were very interested in the outcome of these events in Mexico. This was because over 40,000 Americans lived in Mexico. Also, American businesses had invested about 1 billion dollars in Mexico." Here Challenge makes almost a pun of interested. In its ensuing analysis of Wilson's interventions, Challenge never again mentions American interests and instead takes Wilson's policies at face value. The treatment of Wilson's Haitian invasion in The American Pageant is still more naive:

Hoping to head off trouble, Washington urged Wall Street bankers to pump dollars into the financial vacuums in Honduras and Haiti to keep out foreign funds. The United States, under the Monroe Doctrine,

would not permit foreign nations to intervene, and consequently it had some moral obligation to interfere financially to prevent economic and political chaos.

Evidently even our financial intervention was humanitarian! The authors of Pageant could use a shot of the realism supplied by former Marine Corps Gen, Smedley D. Butler, whose 19 31 statement has become famous:

I helped make Mexico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenue in. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers. . . . I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916, I helped make Honduras "right" for American fruit

companies in 1903. Looking back on it, I might have given Al Capone a few hints.

Business influence on U.S. foreign policy did not start with Woodrow Wilson's administration, however. John A. Hobson, in his 1903 book Imperialism, described “a constantly growing tendency” of the wealthy class “to use their political power as citizens of this State to interfere with the political condition of those States where they have an industrial stake.”17 Nor did such influence end with Wilson. Jonathan Kwitny'$ fine book Endless Enemies cites various distortions of U.S. foreign policy owing to specific economic interests of individual corporations and/or to misconceived ideological interests of U.S. foreign policy planners. Kwitny points out that during the entire period from 1953 to 1977, the people in charge of U.S. foreign policy were all on the Rockefeller family payroll. Dean Rusk and Henry Kissinger, who ran our foreign policy from 1961 to 1977, were dependent upon Rockefeller payments for their very solvency.18 Nonetheless, no textbook ever mentions the influence of multinationals on U.S. policy. This is the case not necessarily because textbook authors are afraid of offending multinationals, but because they never discuss any influence on U.S. policy. Rather, they present our governmental policies as rational humanitarian responses to trying situations, and they do not seek to penetrate the surface of the government's own explanations of its actions.

Having ignored why the federal government acts as it does, textbooks proceed to ignore much of what the government does. Textbook authors portray the U.S. government's actions as agreeable and nice, even when U.S. government officials have admitted motives and intentions of a quite different nature. Among the less savory examples are various attempts by U.S. officials and agencies to assassinate leaders or bring down governments of other countries. The United States has indulged in activities of this sort at least since the Wilson administration, which hired two Japanese-Mexicans to try to poison Pancho Villa,' I surveyed the twelve textbooks to see how they treated six more recent US, attempts to subvert foreign governments. To ensure that the events were adequately covered in the historical literature, I examined only incidents that occurred before 1973, well before any of these textbooks went to press. The episodes are:

1. our assistance to the shah's faction in Iran in deposing Prime Minister Mussadegh and returning the shah to the throne in 1953;

2, our role in bringing down the elected government of

Guatemala in 1954;

3. our rigging of the 1957 election in Lebanon, which entrenched the Christians on top and led to the Muslim revolt and civil war the next year;

4. our involvement in the assassination of Patrice Lumumba of Zaire in 1961;

5, our repeated attempts to murder Premier Fidel Castro of Cuba and bring down his government by terror and sabotage; and 6, our role in bringing down the elected government of Chile in 1973.

The U.S. government caJls actions such as these "state-sponsored terrorism" when other countries do them to us. We would be indignant to learn of Cuban or Libyan attempts to influence our politics or destabilize our economy. Our government expressed outrage at Iraq's Saddam Hussein for trying to arrange the assassination of former President Bush when he visited Kuwait in 1993 and retaliated with a bombing attack on Baghdad, yet the United States has repeatedly orchestrated similar assassination attempts.

In 1990 Warren Cohen resigned from the historical committee that he headed at the State Department to protest the government's deletion from its official history of U.S. foreign relations of "all mention of the C.I.A. coup that put Shah Mohammed Riza Pahlevi in power in Iran in 1953."3¡ Eight of the twelve textbooks I reviewed would side with the U.S. government against Cohen: they too say nothing about our overthrow of Mussadegh. The American Pageant and Life and Liberty stand out with far and away the most accurate accounts. Here is the paragraph from Life and Liberty:

The United Slates had been a long-time friend of the ruler of Iran, Shah Reza Pahlevi. In fact, the United States had helped him to his throne by overthrowing a democratically elected government in 1953, which the United States felt was too leftist. America supplied the shah with large numbers of arms, and also trained the shah's army and police. Unfortunately, the shah used the army and police to form a police state.

Triumph of the American Nation and Land of Promise mention that the United States deposed Mussadegh but justify the act as anticommunist. In the words of Promise, "In 1953, a Communist-backed political party seized control of the government and attempted to assert control over Iran's oil resources." This will not do: Mussadegh himself had led the drive to expel the Soviets from northern Iran after World War II. And his party did not "seize control" any more than parties do in other parliamentary

democracies such as Canada or Great Britain. Indeed, the shah himself had appointed Mussadegh prime minister because of his immense popularity in parliament and among the people.

The other eight textbooks say nothing about our government's actions in prerevolutionary Iran. The only specific U.S. action in Iran that A History ofthe Republic reports, for example, is our assistance in wiping out malaria! When these textbooks' authors later describe the successful attempt in 1979 by the people of Iran to overthrow the shah, their accounts cannot explain why Iranians might be so upset with the United States. Of the twelve textbooks, only Lift and Liberty and The American Pageant explain the shah's unpopularity as a ruler imposed from without and America's unpopularity owing to our identification with the shah and his policies. Thus only two books give students a basis for understanding why Iranians held Americans hostage for more than a year during the Carter administration.

In Guatemala in 1954, the CIA threatened the government of Jacobo Arbenz with an armed invasion, Arbenz had antagonized the United Fruit Company by proposing land reform and planning a highway and railroad that might break their trade monopoly. The United States chose an obscure army colonel as the new president, and when Arbenz panicked and sought asylum in the Mexican embassy, we flew our man to the capital aboard the US. ambassador's private plane. Only one textbook, The American Tradition, mentions the incident:

In the 195s the United States, concerned with stopping the spread of communism, directed its attention to Latin America once again. In 1954 the CIA helped to overthrow the leftist government of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman in Guatemala. In following years, in order to prevent communist takeovers, the United States continued to support unpopular conservative or military governments in Latin America.

Here, as with Promise's account of Iran, Tradition offers anticommunism as the sole motive for U.S. policies. Bear in mind that this incident took place at the height of McCarthyism, when, as Lewis Lapham has pointed out, the United States saw communism everywhere; “When the duly elected Guatemalan president, Jacobo Arbenz, began to talk too much like a democrat, the United States accused him of communism.”21 Thirty years later The American Tradition maintains the US. government's McCarthyist rhetoric as fact.

Not one textbook includes a word about how the United States helped the Christians in Lebanon fix the 1957 parliamentary election in that then tenuously balanced country. The next year,

denied a fair share of power by electoral means, the Muslims took to armed combat, and President Eisenhower sent in the marines on the Christians' behalf Five books discuss that 1958 intervention. Land of Promise offers the fullest treatment;

Next, chaos broke out in Lebanon, and the Lebanese President, Camille Chamoun, fearing a leftist coup, asked for American help. Although reluctant to interfere, in July 1958 Eisenhower sent 15,000 United States marines into Lebanon. Order was soon restored, and the marines were withdrawn.

This is standard textbook rhetoric: chaos seems always to be breaking out or about to break out. Other than communism, “chaos” is what textbooks usually offer to explain the actions of the other side. Communism offers no real explanation either. Kwitny points out that the United States has often behaved so badly in the Third World that some governments and independence movements saw no alternative but to turn to the USSR.23 Since textbook authors are unwilling to criticize the U.S. government, they present opponents ofthe United States that are not intelligible. Only by disclosing our actions can textbooks provide readers with rational accounts of our adversaries.

Promise goes on to tell the happy results of our intervention: “Although there was no immediate Communist threat to Lebanon, Eisenhower demonstrated that the United States could react quickly. As a result, tensions in the region receded.” In reality, the civil war in Lebanon lasted until the 1980s, with mounting destruction in Beirut and throughout the nation. In 1983 a whole lot of chaos broke out, so President Reagan sent in our marines again. A truck bomb then killed more than two hundred marines in their barracks, and three textbooks treat that intervention. Two of them say nothing about our involvement in either 1957 or 1958, and the remaining textbook, The American Pageant. tells of Eisenhower's 1958 intervention in even rosier terms than Land of Promise. So not one of twelve textbooks offers students anything of substance about the continuity of conflict in Lebanon or our role in causing it.

“ZaYre” or “the Congo” appears in the index of just two textbooks, The American Pageant and Triumph ofthe American Nation, Neither book mentions that the CIA urged the assassination of Patrice Lumumba in 1961.“ Pageant offers an accurate account of the beginning of the strife: ”The African Congo received its independence from Belgium in 1960 and immediately exploded into violence. The United Nations sent in a peacekeeping force, to which Washington contributed much money but no manpower.“ There Pageant stops. The account in

Triumph of the American Nation mentions Lumumba by name: ”A new crisis developed in 1961 when Patrice Lumumba, leader of the pro-Communist faction, was assassinated.“ Triumph says nothing about U.S. involvement with the assassination, however, and concludes with the happiest of endings: ”By the late 1960s, most scars of the civil war seemed healed. The Congo (Zaire) became one of the most prosperous African nations.“ Would that it were! The CIA helped bring to power Joseph Mobutu, a former army sergeant. By the end of the 1960s, Triumph to the contrary, Zaire under Mobutu had become one of the most wretched African nations, economically and politically. As of 1993, Mobutu had yet to hold an election, allow the free functioning of political parties, or condone a free press. The New York Times noted that starvation was growing in Zaire and called the problems ”self-inflicted, the result of nearly 30 years of Government corruption.“24 While per capita income in Zaire fell by more than two-thirds, Mobutu himself became one of the richest persons on the planet and perhaps the most hated person in the country.25 As I write in 1994, Zaire is ripe for a ”new“ crisis to ”develop," quite possibly with anti-American overtones. If it does, we can be sure, textbooks will be just as surprised as our students when “chaos breaks out.” Ali twelve textbooks are silent about our repeated attempts to assassinate Premier Fidel Castro of Cuba. The federal government had tried to kill Castro eight times by 1965, according to testimony before the US. Senate; by 1975 Castro had thwarted twenty-four attempts, according Ç_Cuba. These undertakings ranged from a botched effort to get Castro to light an exploding cigar to a contract with the Mafia to murder him. Since Pres. John F, Kennedy probably ordered several of the earlier attempts on Castro's life personally, including the Mafia contract, Kennedy's own assassination might be explained as a revenge slaying. Because no textbook tells how Kennedy tried to kill Castro, however, none can logically suggest a Cuban or Mafia connection in discussing Kennedy's death,i6 The Kennedy administration also lied about its sponsorship of the Bay of Pigs invasion; immediately after that failed, Kennedy launched Operation Mongoose, “a vast covert program” to destabilize Cuba. Pierre Salinger, Kennedy's press secretary, has written that JFK even planned to invade Cuba with U.S. armed forces until forestalled by the Cuban missile crisis.27 No textbook tells about Operation Mongoose.

Undaunted by its failures in Cuba, the CIA turned its attention farther south. Only three textbooks, Life and Liberty, The American Adventure, and Triumph of the American Nation,

mention Chile. “President Nixon helped the Chilean army overthrow Chile's elected government because he did not like its radical socialist policies,” Lift and Liberty says bluntly This single sentence, which is all that Life and Liberty offers, lies buried in a section about President Carter's human rights record, but it is far and away the best account in any of the textbooks. According to Triumph, Nixon approved “the secret use offunds by the CIA to try to prevent a socialist-communist election victory in Chile. The CIA later made it difficult for the Marxist government elected by these parties to govern.” Since the “difficulties” President Allende faced included his own murder, perhaps this is the ultimate euphemism! TheAmericanAdventureoffers a fuller account:

Some people, in the United States and abroad, said that the United States arranged the overthrow of Allende. Indeed, in 1974, Pres. Ford admitted that the United States CIA had given help to the opposition to Allende. However, he denied that the United States encouraged or knew ofthe revolutionary plan.

Why leave our involvement open to question? Historians know that the CIA had earlier joined with ITT to try to defeat Allende in the 1970 elections. Failing this, the United States sought to disrupt the Chilean economy and bring down Allende's government. The United States blocked international loans to Chile, subsidized opposition newspapers, labor unions, and political parties, denied spare parts to industries, paid for and fomented a nationwide truckers' strike that paralyzed the Chilean economy, and trained and financed the military that staged the bloody coup in 1973 in which Allende was killed. The next year, CIA Director William Colby testified that “a secret high-level intelligence committee led by Kissinger himself had authorized CIA expenditures of over $8,000,000 during the period 1970-73 to 'destabilize' the government of Pres. Allende.“28 Secretary of State Kissinger himself later explained, ”I don't see why we have to let a country go Marxist just because its people are irresponsible.“29 Since the Chilean people's ”irresponsibility” consisted of voting for Allende, here Kissinger openly says that the United States should not and will not respect the electoral process or sovereignty of another country if the results do not please us. With this attitude and policy in place in our government, whether the CIA or its Chilean allies pulled the trigger on Allende amounts to a nitpicking detail. The American Adventure at least mentions our action in Chile; however, nine books overlook it entirely.

Do textbooks need to include all government skullduggery? Certainly not. I am not arguing in favor of what Paul Gagnon calls

“relentless mentioning.”31 Textbooks do need to analyze at least one ofour interventions in depth, however, for they raise important issues. To defend these acts on moral grounds is not easy. The acts diminish U.S. foreign policy to the level of Mafia thuggery, strip the United States ofits claim to lawful conduct, and reduce our prestige around the world. To be sure, covert violence may be defensible on tealpolitik grounds as an appropriate way to deal with international problems. It can be argued that the United States should be destabilizing governments in other countries, assassinating leaders unfriendly to us, and fighting undeclared unpublicized wars. The six cloak-and-dagger operations recounted here do not support this view, however. In Cuba, for instance, the CIA's “pointless sabotage operations,” in Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones's words, “only increased Castro's popularity.” Even when they succeed, these covert acts provide only a short-term fix, keeping people who worry us out of power for a time, but identifying the United States with repressive, undemocratic, unpopular regimes, hence undermining our long-term interests. The historian Ronald Kessler relates that a CIA officer responsible for engineering Arbenz's downfall in Guatemala agreed later that overthrowing elected leaders is a short-sighted policy.“ ”Was it desirable to trade Mossadegh for the Ayatollah Khomeni?“ asks the historian Charles Ameringer about our ”success“ in Iran. When covert attacks fail, like the Bay of Pigs landing in 1961, they leave the U.S. government with no viable next step short of embarrassed withdrawal or oven military intervention. If instead of covert action we had had a public debate about how to handle Mussadegh or Castro, we might have avoided Khomeni or the Bay of Pigs debacle. Unless we become more open to nationalist governments that embody the dreams of their people, Robert F. Smith believes we will face ”crisis after crisis.

This debate cannot take place in American history courses, however, because most textbooks do not let on about what our government has done. Half of the twelve textbooks I surveyed leave out all six incidents. Most of the other textbooks pretend, when treating the one or two incidents they include, that our actions were based on humanitarian motives. Thus textbook authors portray the United Stales basically as an idealistic actor, responding generously to other nations' social and economic woes. Robert Leckie has referred to “the myth of 'the most peace-loving nation in the world'” and noted that it persists “in American folklore.” It also persists in our history textbooks.

These interventions raise another issue: are they compatible

with democracy? Covert violent operations against foreign nations, individuals, and political parties violate the openness on which our own democracy relies. Inevitably, covert international interference leads to domestic lying. U.S. citizens cannot possibly critique government policies if they do not know of them. Thus covert violent actions usually flout the popular will. These actions also threaten our long-standing separation of powers, which textbooks so justly laud in their chapters on the Constitution. Covert actions are always undertaken by the executive branch, which typically lies to the legislative branch about what it has done and plans to do, thus preventing Congress from playing its constitutionally intended role.

The US. government lied about most of the six examples of foreign intervention just described. On the same day in 1961 that our Cuban exiles were landing at the Bay of Pigs in their hapless attempt to overthrow Fidel Castro, Secretary of State Dean Rusk said, “The American people are entitled to know whether we are intervening in Cuba or intend to do so in the future. The answer to that question is no.” Among the dead three days later were four American pilots. When asked about Chile in his Seriate confirmation hearings for U.S. Secretary of State in 1973, Henry Kissinger replied, “The CIA had nothing to do with the [Chilean] coup, to the best of my knowledge and belief, and I only put in that qualification in case some madman appears down there who, without instruction, talked to somebody.” Of course, later statements by CIA Director William Colby and Kissinger himself directly contradicted this testimony. The U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee eventually denounced our campaign against the Allende government,

President Eisenhower used national security as his excuse when he was caught in an obvious lie: he denied that the United States was flying over Soviet airspace, only to have captured airman Gary Powers admit the truth on Russian television. Much later, the public learned that Powers had been just the tip of the iceberg: in the 1950s we had some thirty-one flights downed over the USSR, with 170 men aboard. For decades our government lied to the families of the lost men and never made substantial representation to the USSR to get them back, because the flights were illegal and were supposed to be secret. Similarly, during the Vietnam War the government kept our bombing of Laos secret for years, later citing national security as its excuse. This did not fool Laotians, who knew full well we were bombing them, but did fool Americans. Often presidents and their advisors keep actions covert not for reasons of tactics abroad, but because they suspect

the actions would not be popular with Congress or with the American people.

Over and over, presidents have chosen not to risk their popularity by waging the campaign required to persuade Americans to support their secret military policies." Our Constitution provides that Congress must declare war. Back in 1918 Woodrow Wilson tried to keep our intervention in Russia hidden from Congress and the American people. Helen Keller helped get out the truth: “Our governments are not honest. They do not openly declare war against Russia and proclaim the reasons,” she wrote to a New York newspaper in 1919. “They are fighting the Russian people half-secretly and in the dark with the lie of democracy on their lips”38 Ultimately, Wilson failed to keep his invasion secret, but he was able to keep it hidden from American history texrbooks. Therein lies the problem: textbooks cannot report accurately on the six foreign interventions described in this chapter without mentioning that the U.S. government covered them up.

The sole piece of criminal government activity that most textbooks treat is the series of related scandals called Watergate. In its impact on the public, the Watergate break-in stood out. In the early 1970s Congress and the American people learned that President Nixon had helped cover up a string of illegal acts, including robberies of the Democratic National Committee and the office of Lewis Fielding, a psychiatrist. Nixon also tried with some success to use the Internal Revenue Service, the FBI, the CIA, and various regulatory agencies to inspire fear in the hearts of his “enemies list” of people who had dared to oppose his policies or his reelection. In telling of Watergate, textbooks blame Richard Nixon, as they should.59 But they go no deeper. Faced with this undeniable instance of governmental wrongdoing, they manage to retain their uniformly rosy view of the government. In the representative words of The United SlatesA History ofthe Republic, “Although the Watergate crisis was a shock to the nation, it demonstrated the strength of the federal system of checks and balances. Congress and the Supreme Court had successfully checked the power of the President when he appeared to be abusing that power.”

As Richard Rubenstein has pointed out, “the problem will not go away with the departure of Richard Nixon,” because it is structural, stemming from the vastly increased power ofthe federal executive bureaucracy. Indeed, in some ways the Iran-Contra scandal of the Reagan-Bush administrations, a web of secret legal and illegal acts involving the president, vice-

president, cabinet members, special operatives such as Oliver North, and government officials in Israel, Iran, Brunei, and elsewhere, shows an executive branch more out of control than Nixon's.1 Textbooks' failure to put Watergate into this perspective is pan of their authors' apparent program to whitewash the federal government so that schoolchildren will respect it. Since the structural problem in the government has not gone away, it is likely that students will again, in their adult lives, face an out-of-control federal executive pursuing criminal foreign and domestic policies.41 To the extent that their understanding of the government comes from their American history courses, students will be shocked by these events and unprepared to rhink about them.

"Our country . . . may she always be in the right," toasted Stephen Decatur in 1816, "but our country, right or wrong!" Educators and textbook authors seem to want to inculcate the next generation into blind allegiance to our country. Going a step beyond Decatur, textbook analyses fail to assess our actions abroad according to either a standard of right and wrong or realpolitik. Instead, textbooks merely assume that the government tried to do the right thing. Citizens who embrace the textbook view would presumably support any intervention, armed or otherwise, and any policy, protective of our legitimate national interests or not, because they would be persuaded that all our policies and interventions are on behalf of humanitarian aims. They could never credit our enemies with equal humanity.

This "international good guy" approach is educationally dysfunctional if we seek citizens who are able to think rationally about American foreign policy,42 To the citizen raised on textbook platitudes, George Kenrian's realpolitik may be painful to contemplate. Under the thrall of the America-the-good archetype, we expect more from our country. But Kennan describes how nations actually behave. We would not risk the decline ofdemocracy and the end ofWestern civilization if we simply let students see a realistic description and analysis of our foreign policies. Doing so would also help close the embarrassing gap between what high school textbooks say about American foreign policy and how their big brothers, college textbooks in political science courses, treat the subject.

When high school history textbooks turn to the internal affairs of the U.S. government, the books again part company with political scientists. A large chunk of introductory political science coursework is devoted to analyzing the various forces that influence our government's domestic policies. High school

American history textbooks simply credit the government for most of what gets done. This is not surprising, for when authors idealize the federal government, perforce they also distort the real dynamic between the governed and the government. It is particularly upsetting to watch this happen in the field of civil rights, where the courageous acts of thousands of citizens in the 1960s entreated and even forced the government to act.

Between 1960 and 1968 the civil rights movement repeatedly appealed to the federal government for protection and for implementation of federal law, including the Fourteenth Amendment and other laws passed during Reconstruction. Especially during the Kennedy administration, governmental response was woefully inadequate. In Mississippi, movement offices displayed this bitter rejoinder:

THERE' S A STREET IN ITTA BENA CALLED FREEDOM. THERE' S A TOWN IN MISSISSIPPI CALLED LIBERTY. T H E R E ' S A D E P A R T ME N T I N W A S H I N G T O N C A L L E D J U S T I C E .

The Federal Bureau of Investigation's response to the movement's call was especially important, since the FBI is the premier national law enforcement agency. The bureau had a long and unfortunate history of antagonism toward African Americans. J. Edgar Hoover and the agency that became the FBI got their start investigating alleged communists during the Woodrow Wilson administration. Although the last four years of that administration saw more antiblack race riots than any other time in our history, Wilson had agents focus on gathering intelligence on African Americans, not on white Americans who were violating blacks' civil rights. Hoover explained the antiblack race riot of 1919 in Washington, D.C., as due to “the numerous assaults committed by Negroes upon white women.” In that year the agency institutionalized its surveillance of black organizations, not white organizations like the Ku Klux Klan. In the bureau's early years there were a few black agents, but by the 1930s Hoover had weeded out all but two. By the early 1960s the FBI had not a single black officer, although Hoover tried to claim it did by counting his chauffeurs.43 FBI agents in the South were mostly white Southerners who cared what their white Southern neighbors thought of them and were themselves white supremacists. And although this next complaint is reminiscent of the diner who protested that the soup was terrible and there wasn't enough of it, the bureau had far too few agents in the South. In Mississippi it had no office at all and relied for its initial reports on local sheriffs and police chiefs, often precisely the

people from whom the civil rights movement sought protection.

Even in the 1960s Hoover remained an avowed white supremacist who thought the 1954 Supreme Court decision outlawing racial segregation in Brmvn v. Board ofEducation was a terrible error. He helped Kentucky prosecute a Caucasian civil rights leader, Carl Braden, for selling a house in a white neighborhood to a black family. In August 1963 Hoover initiated a campaign to destroy Martin Luther King, Jr., and the civil rights movement. With the approval of Attorney General Robert F Kennedy, he tapped the telephones of King's associ ates, bugged King's hotel rooms, and made tape recordings of King's conversations with and about women. The FBI then passed on [he lurid details, including photographs, transcripts, and tapes, to Sen. Strom Thurmond and other white supremacists, reporters, labor leaders, foundation administrators, and, of course, the president. In 1964 a high FBI administrator sent a tape recording of King having sex, along with an anonymous note suggesting that King kill himself, to the office of King's organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The FBI must have known that the incident might not actually persuade King to commit suicide; the bureau's intention was apparently to get Coretta Scott King to divorce her husband or to blackmail King into abandoning the civil rights movement.44 The FBI tried to sabotage receptions in King's honor when he traveled to Europe to claim the Nobel Peace Prize. Hoover called King “the most notorious liar in the country” and tried to prove that the SCLC was infested with communists. King wasn't the only target: Hoover also passed on disinformation about the Mississippi Summer Project; other civil rights organizations such as CORE and SNCC; and other civil rights leaders, including Jesse Jackson.

At the same time the FBI refused to pass on to King information about death threats to him.J6 The FBI knew these threats were serious, for civil rights workers were indeed being killed. In Mississippi alone, civil rights workers endured more than a thousand arrests 3t the hands of local officials, thirty-five shooting incidents, and six murders. The FBI repeatedly claimed, however, that protecting civil rights workers from violence was not its job.47 In 1962 SNCC sued Robert F Kennedy and J. Edgar Hoover to force them to protect civil rights demonstrators. Desperate to get the federal government to enforce the law in the Deep South, Mississippi civil rights workers Amzie Moore and Robert Moses hit upon the 1964 “Freedom Summer” idea: bring 1,000 northern college students, most of them white, to Mississippi to work among blacks for civil rights. Even this helped

little; white supremacists bombed thirty homes and burned thirty-seven black churches in the summer of 1964 alone.48 After the national outcry prompted by the murders ofJames Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner in Philadelphia, Mississippi, however, the FBI finally opened an office in Jackson. Later that summer, at the 1964 Democratic national convention in Atlantic City, the FBI tapped the phones of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic party and Martin Luther King, Jr.; in so doing, the bureau was complying with a request from Pres. Lyndon Johnson.

Because I lived and did research in Mississippi, I have concentrated on acts of the federal government and the civil rights movement in that state, but the FBI's attack on black and interracial organizations was national in scope. For example, after Congress passed the 1964 Civil Rights Bill, a bowling alley in Orangeburg, South Carolina, refused to obey the law. Students from the nearby black state college demonstrated against the facility. State troopers fired on the demonstrators, killing three and wounding twenty-eight, many of them shot in the balls of their feet as they ran away and threw themselves on the ground to avoid the gunfire. The FBI responded not by helping to identify which officers fired in what became known as “the Orangeburg Massacre,” but by falsifying information about the students to help the troopers with their defense.50 In California, Chicago, and elsewhere in the North, the bureau tried to eliminate the breakfast programs of the Black Panther organization, spread false rumors about venereal disease and encounters with prostitutes to break up Panther marriages, helped escalate conflict between other black groups and the Panthers, and helped Chicago police raid the apartment of Panther leader Fred Hampton and kill him in his bed in 1969.51 The FBI warned black leader Stokely Carmichael's mother of a fictitious Black Panther plot to murder her son, prompting Carmichael to flee the United States.52 It is even possible that the FBI or the CIA was involved in the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr. “Raoul” in Montreal, who supplied King's convicted kiiler, James Ear! Ray, with the alias “Eric Gault,” was apparently a CIA agent. Certainly Ray, a country boy with no income, could never have traveled to Montreal, arranged a false identity, and flown to London without help. Despite or because of these incongruities, the FBI has never shown any interest in uncovering the conspiracy that killed King. Instead, shortly after King's death in 1968, the FBI twice broke into SNCC offices. Years later the bureau tried to prevent King's birthday from becoming a national holiday.

The FBI investigated black faculty members at colleges and universities from Virginia to Montana to California. In 1970 Hoover approved the automatic investigation of “all black student unions and similar organizations organized to project the demands of black students,“ The institution at which I taught, Tougaloo College, was a special target: at one point agents in Jackson even proposed to ”neutralize“ the entire college, in part because its students had sponsored ”out-of-state militant Negro speakers, voter-registration drives, and African cultural seminars and lectures . . , [and] condemned various publicized injustices ro the civil rights of Negroes in Mississippi.” Obviously high crimes and misdemeanors.'4 The FBI's conduct and the federal leadership that tolerated it and sometimes requested it are part of the legacy of the 1960s, alongside such positive achievements as the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. As Kenneth O'Reilly put it, “when the FBI stood against black people, so did the government.”5 How do American history textbooks treat this legacy? They simply leave out everything bad the government ever did. They omit not only the FBI's campaign against the civil rights movement, but also its break-ins and undercover investigations of church groups, organizations promoting changes in U.S. policy in Latin America, and the U.S. Supreme Court.5 Textbooks don't even want to say anything bad about state governments: all ten narrative textbooks in my sample include part of Martin Luther King's “I Have a Dream” speech, but nine of them censor out his negative comments about the govern ments of Alabama and Mississippi.

Not only do textbooks fail to blame the federal government for its opposition to the civil rights movement, many actually credit the government, almost single-handedly, for the advances made during the period. In so doing, textbooks follow what we might call the Hollywood approach to civil rights. To date Hollywood's main feature film on the movement is Alan Parker's Mississippi Burning. In that movie, the three civil rights workers get killed in the first five minutes; for the rest of its two hours the movie portrays not a single civil rights worker or black Mississippian over the age of twelve with whom the viewer could possibly identify Instead, Parker concocts two fictional white FBI agents who play out the hoary “good cop/bad cop” formula and in the process doublehandedly solve the murders. In realitythat is, in the real story on which the movie is basedsupporters of the civil rights movement, including Michael Schwerner's widow, Rita, and every white northern friend the movement could muster, pressured Congress and the executive branch of the federal

government to tbrce the FBI to open a Mississippi office and make bringing the murderers to justice a priority. Meanwhile, Hoover tapped Schwerner's father's telephone to see if he might be a communist! Everyone in eastern Mississippi knew for weeks who had committed the murder and that the Neshoba County deputy sheriff was involved. No innovative police work was required; the FBI finally apprehended the conspirators after bribing one of them with $30,000 to testify against the others.

American history textbooks offer a Parkerlike analysis of the entire civil rights movement. Like the arrests of the Mississippi Klansmen, advances in civil rights are simply the result of good government. Federal initiative in itself "explains" such milestones as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. John F. Kennedy proposed them, Lyndon Baines Johnson passed them through Congress, and thus we have them today. Or, in the immortal passive voice of American History, "Another civil rights measure, the Voting Rights Act, was passed." Several textbooks even reverse the time order, putting the bills first, the civil rights movement later.58 Only American Adventures and Discovering American History show the basic dynamics of the civil rights movement: African Americans, often with white allies, challenged an unjust law or practice in a nonviolent way, which then incited whites to respond barbarically to defend "civilization," in turn appalling the nation and convincing some people to change the law or practice. Only the same two books celebrate the courage of the civil rights volunteers. And only Discovering American History tells how the movement directly challenged the mores of segregation, with the result that some civil rights workers were killed or beaten by white racists simply for holding hands as an interracial couple or eating together in a restaurant. No book educates students about the dynamics that in a democracy should characterize the interrelationship between the people and their government.59 Thus no book tells how citizens can and in fact have forced the government to respond to them.

Instead, textbooks tell us about the outstanding leadership of John F, Kennedy on civil rights. The Challenge of freedom provides a typical treatment:

President Kennedy and his administration responded to the call for racial equality. In June 1963 the President asked for congressional action on far-reaching equal rights laws. Following the President's example, thousands of Americans became involved in the equal rights movement as well. In August 1963 more than 200,000 people took part in a march in Washington, D.C.

This account reverses leader and led. In reality, Kennedy

initially tried to stop the march and sent his vice-president to Norway to keep him away from it because he felt Lyndon Johnson was too procivil rights. Even Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., a Kennedy partisan, has dryly noted that “the best spirit of Kennedy was largely absent from the racial deliberations ofhis presidency.”

The damage is not localized to the unfounded boost textbooks give to Kennedy's reputation, however. When describing the attack on segregation that culminated in the 1954 Supreme Court decision, Triumph of the American Nation makes no mention that African Americans were the plaintiffs and attorneys in Brown v. Board ofEducation or that prior cases also brought by the NAACP prepared the way.61 Today many black students think that desegregation was something the federal government imposed on the black community. They have no idea it was something the black community forced on the federal government.62 Meanwhile, young white Americans can reasonably infer that the federal government has been nice enough to blacks. Crediting the federal government for actions instigated by African Americans and their white allies surely disempowers African American students today, surely helps them feel that they “have never done anything,” as Malcolm X put it.

Textbooks treat the environmental movement similarly, telling how “Congress passed” the laws setting up the Environmental Protection Agency while giving little or no attention to the environmental crusade. Students are again left to infer that the government typically does the right thing on its own. Many teachers don't help; a study of twelve randomly selected teachers of twelfthgrade American government courses found that about the only way the teachers suggested that individuals could influence local or national governments was through voting.

Textbook authors seem to believe that Americans can be loyal to their government only so long as they believe it has never done anything bad. Textbooks therefore present a U.S. government that deserves students' allegiance, not their criticism. “We live in the greatest country in the world,” wrote James F. Delong, an associate of the right-wing textbook critic Mel Gabler, in his critique ofAmerican Adventures, “Any book billing itself as a story of this country should certainly get that heritage and pride across.” American Adventures, in conveying the basic dynamic of the civil rights movement, implies that the US. government was not doing all it should for civil rights. Perhaps as a result, Adventures failed Delong's patriotism test: “I will not, I can not endorse it for use in our schools,”

The textbooks' sycophantic presentations of the federal

government may help win adoptions, but they don't win students' attention. It is boring to read about all the good things the government did on its own, with no dramatic struggles. Moreover, most adult Americans no longer trust the government as credulously as they did in the 1950s, Between about 1960 and 1974 revelation after revelation of misconduct and deceit in the federal executive branch shattered the trust of the American people, as confirmed in poll after opinion poll. Textbook authors, since they are unwilling to say bad things about the government, come across as the last innocents in America. Their trust is poignant. They present students with a benign government whose statements should be believed. This is hardly the opinion of their parents, who, according to opinion polls, remain deeply skeptical of what leaders in the federal government tell them. To encounter so little material in school about the bad things the government has done, especially when parents and the daily newspaper tell a different story, “makes all education suspect,” according to Donald Barr.

Nor can the textbook authors' servile approach to the government teach students to be effective citizens. Just as the story of Columbus-the-wise has as its flip side the archetype of the superstitious unruly crew, so the archetype of a wise and good government implies that the correct role for us citizens is to follow its leadership. Without pushing the point too far, it does seem that many twentieth-century nondemocratic states, from the Third Reich to the Central African Empire, have had citizens who gave their governments too much rather than too little allegiance. The United States, on the other hand, has been blessed with dissenters. Some of these dissenters have had to flee the country. Since 1776 Canada has provided a refuge for Americans who disagreed with policies of the US. government, from Tories who fled harassment during and after the Revolution, to free blacks who sought haven from the Dred Scoit ruling, to young men of draftable age who opposed the Vietnam War. No textbook mentions this Canadian role, because no textbook portrays a U.S. government that might ever merit such principled opposition.

Certainly many political scientists and historians in the United States suggest that governmental actions are a greater threat to democracy than citizen disloyalty. Many worry that the dominance of the executive branch has eroded the checks and balances built into the Constitution. Some analysts also believe that the might of the federal government vis-a-vis state governments has made a mockery of federalism. From the Woodrow Wilson administration until now, the federal executive

has grown ever stronger and now looms as by far our nation's largest employer. In the last thirty years, the power of the CIA, the National Security Council, and other covert agencies has grown to become, in some eyes, a fearsome fourth branch of government. Threats to democracy abound when officials in the FBI, the CIA, the State Department, and other institutions of government determine not only our policies but also what the people and the Congress need to know about them.

By downplaying covert and illegal acts by the government, textbook authors narcotize students from thinking about such issues as the increasing dominance of the executive branch. By taking the government's side, textbooks encourage students to conclude that criticism is incompatible with citizenship. And by presenting government actions in a vacuum, rather than as responses to such institutions as multinational corporations and civil rights organizations, textbooks mystify the creative tension between the people and their leaders. All this encourages students to throw up their hands in the belief that the government determines everything anyway, so why bother, especially if its actions are usually so benign. Thus our American history textbooks minimize [he porential power of the people and, despite their best patriotic efforts, take a stance that is overtly antidemocratic.

If we do not speak of it, others will surely rewrite the script. Each of the body bags, all of the mass graves will be reopened and their contents abracadabraed into a noble cause.

George Swiers, Vietnam veteran When information which properly belongs to the public is systematically withheld by those in power, the people soon become ignorant of their own affairs, distrustful of those who manage them, andeventuallyincapable of determining their own destinies.

Richard M. Nixon The aim of the historian, then, is to know the elements of the present by understanding what came into the present from the past, for the present is simply the developing past.. .. The goal of the historian is the living present.

We see things not as they are but as we are.

Frederick Jackson Turner3 Anai's Nin

Lies My Teacher Told Me

9. Down the Memory Hole: The Disappearance of the Recent…

Many African societies divide humans into three categories: those still alive on the earth, the sasha, and the zamani. The recently departed whose time on earth overlapped with people still here are the sasha, the living-dead. They are not wholly dead, for they still live in the memories of the living, who can call them to mind, create their likeness in art, and bring them to life in anecdote. When the last person to know an ancestor dies, that ancestor leaves the sasha for the zamani, the dead. As generalized ancestors, the zamani are not forgotten but revered. Many, like George Washington or Clara Barton, can be recalled by name. But they are not living-dead. There is a difference.

Because we lack these Kiswahili terms, we rarely think about this distinction systematically, but we also make it. Consider how we read an account of an event we lived through, especially one in which we ourselves took part, whether a sporting event or the Persian Gulf War. We read partly in a spirit of criticism, assessing what the authors-got wrong as well as agreeing with and perhaps learning from what they got right. When we study the more distant past, we may also read critically, but now our primary mode is ingestive. Especially if we are reading for the first time about an event, we have little ground on which to stand and criticize what we read.

Authors of American history textbooks appear all too aware of the sashaof the fact that teachers, parents, and textbook adoption board members were alive in the recent past. They seem uncomfortable with it. Revering the zamanigeneralized ancestorsis more their style. By definition, the world of the sasha is controversial, because readers bring to it their own knowledge and understanding, which may not agree with what is written. Therefore, the less said about the recent past, the better. I examined how the ten narrative American histories in my sample cover the five decades leading up to the 1980s. (I excluded the 1980s because some of the textbooks came out in that decade, so they could not

be expected to cover it fully.) On average, the textbooks give 47 pages to the 1930s, 43.6 pages to the 1940s, and fewer than 35 pages to each later decade. Even the turbulent decade of the 1960sincluding the civil rights movement, most of the Vietnam War, and the murders of Martin Luther King, Jr., Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and John and Robert Kennedygets fewer than 35 pages.

I used the qualifier narrative in the previous paragraph because the examination revealed a striking difference between the two inquiry textbooks and the narrative textbooks. Discovering American History and The American Adventure, which consist largely of maps, illustrations, and extracts from primary sources, do not downplay the sasha. Indeed, their attention to the recent past is indicative of their authors' intention of making history relevant to current events and issues. Even these two textbooks' early chapters challenge students to apply what they learn to the present. Therefore, despite the fact that both of the books were published before the 1970s ended, they give more space to the 1960s and 1970s than do the ten narrative textbooks. Unfortunately, these textbooks have long since gone out of favor and print, and, as far as I know, no inquiry textbooks remain on the market. Their lack of continued commercial viability suggests that by slighting the recent past publishers of narrative textbooks are somehow meeting a need. Probably it is the need to avoid controversy.

Avoiding the sasha surely does not meet students' needs. Textbook authors may work on the assumption that covering recent events thoroughly is unnecessary because students already know about them. Since textbook authors tend not to be young, however, what is sasha for them is zamani to their students.

As we college professors get older, we grow ever more astonished at what our undergraduatesdon't know about the recent past. I first became aware of this phenomenon as the 1970s inexorably became the 1980s. Lecturing on the Vietnam War, I increasingly got blank looks. One in four, then one in two, and in the 1990s four in five first-year college students have not known the meaning of the four-letter words bowk and dove. On the first day of class in 1989 I gave my students a quiz including the open-ended question, “Who fought in the war in Vietnam?” Almost a fourth of my students said the combatants were North and South Korea! I was stunnedto me this resembled answering “1957” to the

question “When did the War of 1812 begin?” In fact, many recent high school graduates know more about the War of 1812 than about the Vietnam War.

It makes little sense and surely does no good to blame the students. It can hardly be their fault. If our civic memories begin when we are about ten years old, then the last students to have any memory of the Vietnam War graduated from high school in the spring of 1983. The war is unknown territory to today's college undergraduates, who were not alive when it ended. So are the women's movement, Watergate, and the Carter presidency. Movies, novels, songs, and other elements of popular culture do treat the recent past, but these fuse fact and fiction, as any Rambo fan can attest.6 Students need information about the recent past from their high school American history courses. The recent past is, after all, the history with the most immediate impact upon our lives today. The notion that history courses should slight the sasha for the distant zamani is perverse. Comparing textbook coverage of the Vietnam War and the War of 18 12 illuminates this perversion.

The War of 1812 took place almost two centuries ago and killed maybe two thousand Americans. Nevertheless, high school history books devote the same quantitative coveragenine pagesto the War of 1812 and the Vietnam War. One might argue, I suppose, that the War of 1812 was so much more important than the Vietnam War that it deserves as much space. Our textbooks make no such claim; most textbook authors don't know what to make of the War of 1812 and don't claim any particular importance for it.

Since the War of 1812 lasted only half as long as the Vietnam War, authors can treat it in far more detail. They enjoy the luxury of telling about individual battles and heroes in 1812. Land of Promise, for instance, devotes three paragraphs to a naval battle offPut-in-Bay Island in Lake Erie, which works out to one paragraph per hour of battle! Vietnam gets no such detail.

Scant space is only part of the problem. Nine gripping analytic pages on ihe Vietnam War might prove more than adequate.7 We must ask what kind of coverage textbooks provide, beginning with the images they supply. Photographs have been partofthe record ofwar in the United States since Matthew Brady's famous images of the Civil War. In Vietnam, television images joined still photos to shape the perceptions and sensibility of the American people. More than any other

war in our history, the Vietnam War was distinguished by a series of images that seared themselves into the public consciousness. I have asked dozens of adults old enough to have lived during the war to tell me what visual images they remember; the list of images they have supplied shows remarkable overlap, A short list includes these five specific images:

a Buddhist monk sitting at a Saigon intersection immolating himself to protest the South Vietnamese government;

the little girl running naked down Highway 1, fleeing a napalm attack; the national police chief executing a terrified man, suspected of being in the Viet Cong, with a pistol shot to the side of his head; the bodies in the ditch after the My Lai massacre; and Quang Due, the first Buddhist monk to set himself on fire to protest the policies of the Ngo Dinh Diem regime that the United States supported in South Vietnam, shocked the South Vietnamese and the American people. Before the war ended, several other Vietnamese and at least one American followed Quang Puc's example.

Americans evacuating from a Saigon rooftop by helicopter, while desperate Vietnamese try to climb aboard.

The list might also include at least two generic images: B-5s with bombs streaming below them into the pock-marked countryside of Vietnam, and a ruined city such as Hue, nothing but rubble in view, as American and Sourh Vietnamese troops move in to retake it after the Tet offensive.

Merely reading these short descriptions prompts most older Americans to remember the images in sharp detail. The emotions that accompanied them come back vividly as well. Of course, since the main American involvement in the war took place from 1965 to 1973, Americans must have been at least thirty in 1993 to have these images in their sasha. Today's young people have little chance to see or recall these images unless their history books provide them.

They don't. These photographs have gone down the memory hole, that chute to the furnace where embarrassing facts burn to a crisp in George Orwell's 1984, A single book, The American Pageant, includes one of these pictures; the This little girl. Kim Phuc, ran screaming down Highway 1, fleeing from an accidental napalm attack on her village by South Vietnamese airplanes. She had stripped off her burning clothing as she ran. The television footage and still

photographs of her flight were among the most searing of the war. The photograph violates two textbook taboos at once: no textbook ever shows anyone naked and none shows such suffering, even in time of war.

police chief shooting the terrified man,10 No other textbook reproduces any of them. The American Advenmres contains an image of our bombing Vietnam, but the photograph shows B-5s and bombs from below and gives no sense of any damage on the ground.

The seven cited images are important examples of the primary materials of the Vietnam War. Hawks might claim that these images exaggerate the aspects of the war they portray. However, the images have additional claims to historical significance: they made history, for they affected the way Americans thought about the war. Several of these photographs remain “among the most wellknown images in the world even now [1991],” according to Patrick Hagopian.“ Leaving them out of history textbooks shortchanges today's readers. As a student of mine wrote, ”To show a photograph of one naked girl crying after she has been napalmcd changes the entire meaning of that war to a high school student.

In Vietnam the U.S. dropped three times as many explosives as tt dropped in all theaters of World War II, even including our nuclear bombing of &&

Hiroshima and Nagasaki, so textbook authors have many images of bomb DOWN THE MEMORY HOLE -

Nguyen Ngoc Loan, the national police chief of South Vietnam, casually shot this terri fied man, suspected of being a Viet Cong sympathizer, on a street in Saigon as an American photographer and television crew looked on. This photograph helped persuade many Americans that their side was not morally superior to the communists.12 The image is so haunting that, twenty-five years later, I have only to cock my fingers like a gun and people who were old enough to read newspapers or watch television in 1968 immediately recall the event and can describe it in some detail.

damage to choose from. On the ground, after the Tet offensive, in which Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops captured cities and towns all over South Vietnam, American and South Vietnamese troops shelled Hue, Ben Tre, Quang Tri, and other cities before moving in to retake them. Nonetheless, not one textbook shows any damage done by our side.

Of course, the authors and editors of textbooks choose among thousands of images of the Vietnam War. They might make different selections and still do justice lo the war. But at the very least they must show atrocities against the Vietnamese civilian population, for these were a frequent and even inevitable pan of this war without front lines, in which our armed forces had only the foggiest notion as to who was ally or opponent. Indeed, attacks on civilians were U.S. policy, as shown by Gen. William C. Westmoreland's characterization of civilian casualties; “It does deprive the enemy of the population, doesn't it?”“ We evaluated our progress by bodycounts and drew free-fire zones in which the LEFT: In the My Lai massacre American combat troops murdered women, old men, and children. Ronald Haeberle's photographs, including this one, which ran in Life magazine, seared the massacre into the nation's consciousness and still affect our culture.” Most Hollywood movies made about Vietnam include My Lai imagery; Platoon offers a particularly vivid example.

RIGHT: On April, 29, 1975, trtis American helicopter evacuated people from a Saigon rooftop. The next day Saigon fell and the long American (and Vietnamese) nightmare came to an end. Half of all Americans alive today were younger than ten or not yet born when this photograph was taken. Thus half know the war only from movies and textbooks.

entire civilian population was treated as the enemy. Such a strategy inevitably led to war crimes. Thus My Lai was not a minor event, unworthy of inclusion in a nation's history but was important precisely because it was emblematic of much ofwhat went wrong with the entire war in Vietnam. My Lai was the most famous instance of what John Kerry, formerly of Vietnam Veterans Against the War, now a U.S. senator, called “not isolated incidents but crimes committed on a day-to-day basis with the full awareness of officers at all levels of command.” Appearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in April 1971, Kerry said, “Over 150 honorably discharged and many very highly decorated veterans testified to war crimes committed in Southeast Asia,” He went on to retell how American troops "had personally raped, cut off ears, cut off heads, taped wires from portable telephones to human genitals and turned up the power, cut off limbs, blown up bodies, randomly shot at civilians, razed villages in fashion reminiscent of Genghis Khan, shot cattle and dogs for fun, poisoned food DOWN THE MEMORY HOLE

The only photograph of troops in Triumph of the American Nation shows them happily surrounding President Johnson when he visited the American base at Cam Ranh Bay during the war.

stocks, and generally ravaged the countryside of South Vietnam.“ All this was ”in addition to the normal ravage of war."15 Any photograph of an American soldier setting fire to a Vietnamese hootch (house), a common sight during the war, would get this point across, but no textbook uses any photograph of any wrongdoing by an American. Indeed, no book includes any photograph of any destruction, even of legitimate targets, caused by our side. Only Discovering American History, an inquiry textbook, treats the My Lai massacre as anything but an isolated incident. In addition to leaving students ignorant of the history of the war, the silence of other textbooks on this matter also makes the antiwar movement incomprehensible.

Two textbook authors, James West Davidson and Mark H. Lytle, are on record elsewhere as knowing of the importance of My Lai. “The American strategy had atrocity built into it,” Lytle said to me. Davidson and Lytle devote most of a chapter to the My Lai massacre in their book After the Fart. There they tell how news of the massacre stunned the United States. “One thihg'was cer tain,” they write, “the encounter became a defining moment in the public's perception of the war,” Plainly they do not think high school students need to know about it, however, for their high school history textbook, The United StatesA History ofthe Republic, like seven other textbooks in my sample, never mentions My Lai.

If textbooks omit all the important photographs of the Vietnam War, what images do they include? Uncontroversial shots, for the most partservicemen on patrol, walking through swamps, or jumping from helicopters. Seven books show refugees or damage caused by the other side, but since such damage was usually less extensive than that caused by our bombardment, the pictures are not very dramatic What about their prose? Sadly, textbook authors also leave out all the memorable quotations of the era. Martin Luther King, Jr., the first major leader to come out against the war, opposed it in his trademark cadences: “We have destroyed their two most cherished institutions: the family and the village. We have destroyed their land and their crops. . . . We have corrupted their women and children and killed their men.”17 No textbook quotes King. Even more famous was the dissent

of Muhammad Ali, then the heavyweight boxing champion of the world. Ali refused induction into the military, for which his title was stripped from him, and said, “No Viet Cong ever called me 'nigger.'” All twelve textbooks leave out that line too. After the Tet offensive, a US. army officer involved in retaking Ben Tre said, “It became necessary to destroy the town to save it.” For millions of Americans, this statement summarized America's impact on Vietnam. No textbook supplies it. Nor does any textbook quote John Kerry's plea for immediate withdrawal: “How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?”19 Indeed, the entire antiwar movement becomes unintelligible because textbooks do not allow it to speak for itself. They exclude the antiwar songs, the chants“Hell, no; we won't go!” and “Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?”and, above all, the emotions.20 Virtually the only people who get quoted are Presidents Johnson and Nixon. In a typical passage in The American Pageant, Nixon says, “America cannot-and will notconceive all the plans, design all the programs, execute all the decisions, and undertake all the defense of the free nations of the world.” The passage does not help to clarity the war or the opposition to it. Even Pageant's auxiliary reader quotes only Johnson and Nixon as primary sources on the Vietnam Warnot a word from those who fought in or opposed it.

Having excluded the sights, the sounds, and the feelings of the Vietnam era, textbook authors proceed to exclude the issues. Frances FitzGerald, who, in addition to America Revised, wrote Fire in the Lake, a fine book about Vietnam, called the textbooks she reviewed in 1979 “neither hawkish nor dovish on the warthey are simply evasive.” She went on to say, "Since it is really quite hard DOWN THE MEMORY HOLE .

to discuss the war and evade all the major issues, their Vietnam sections make remarkable reading."21 To some degree, defining the issues is a matter of interpretation, and I would not want to fault textbooks for holding a different interpretation from my own. Perhaps we can agree that any reasonable treatment of the Vietnam War would discuss at least these six questions:

Why did the United States fight in Vietnam? What was the war like before the United States entered it? How did we change it? How did the war change the United States? Why did an antiwar movement become so strong in the United

States?

What were its criticisms of the war in Vietnam? Were they right? Why did the United States lose the war? What lesson(s) should we take from the experience?

Simply to list these questions is to recognize that each of them is still controversial. Take the first. Some people still argue that the United States fought in Vietnam to secure access to the country's valuable natural resources. Others claim that we fought to bring democracy to Vietnam's people. Perhaps more common are analyses of our internal politics: Democratic Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, having seen how Republicans castigated Truman for “losing” China, did not want to be seen as “losing” Vietnam. Another interpretation brings forth the domino theory: while we know now that Vietnam's communists are antagonists of China, we didn't then, and some leaders believed that if Vietnam “fell” to the communists, so would Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Yet another view is that America felt its prestige was on the line, so it did not want a defeat in Vietnam, lest Pax Americana be threatened in Africa, South America, or elsewhere in the world.“ Some conspiracy theorists go even further and claim that big business fomented the war to help the economy. Other historians take a longer view, arguing that our intervention in Vietnam derives from a cultural pattern of racism and imperialism that began with the first Indian war in Virginia in 1622, continued in the nineteenth century with ”Manifest Destiny,“ and is now winding down in the ”American century." They point out that GI's in Vietnam collected and displayed Vietnamese ears just as British colonists in North America collected and displayed Indian scalps.23 A final view might be that there was no clear cause and certainly no clear purpose, that we blundered into the war because no subsequent administration had the courage to undo our 1946 mistake of opposing a popular independence movement. “The fundamental blunder with respect to Indochina was made after 1945,” wrote Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, when “our Government allowed itself to be persuaded” by the French and British “to restore France's colonial position in Indochina.”!

Perhaps the seeds of America's tragic involvement with Vietnam were sown at Versailles in 1918, when Woodrow Wilson failed to hear Ho Chi Minn's plea for his country's independence. Perhaps they germinated when FDR's policy of

not helping the French recolonize Southeast Asia after World War II terminated with his death. Since textbooks rarely suggest that [he events of one period caused events of the next, unsurprisingly, none of the textbooks I surveyed look before the 1950s to explain the Vietnam War.

Within the 1950s and 1960s, the historical evidence for some of these conflicting interpretations is much weaker than for others, although I will not choose sides here.23 Textbook authors need not choose sides, either. They could present several interpretations, along with an overview of the historical support for each, and invite students to come to their own conclusions. Such challenges are not the textbook authots' style, however. They seem compelled to present the "right" answer to all questions, even unresolved controversies.

So which interpretation do they choose? None of the above! Most textbooks simply dodge the issue. Here is a representative analysis, from American Adventures: "Later in the 195s, war broke out in South Vietnam, This time the United States gave aid to the South Vietnamese government." "War broke out" what could be simpler! Adventures devotes four pages to discussing why we got into the War of 1812 but just these two sentences to why we fought in Vietnam.

One reason textbook authors tiptoe through the recent past, evading all the main issues, may be that they do not feel they have the expertise to deal with it. None of the forty-five authors of the twelve textbooks in my sample is an expert on the recent past, so far as I can tell. Of course, even textbooks written by several authors necessarily treat many subjects on which their authors cannot be expert. For topics in the zamani, however, textbook authors can use historical perspective as a shield. By writing in an omniscient boring tone about events in the zamani, authors imply that a single historic truth exists, upon which historians have agreed and which they now teach and students now should memorize. Such writing implies that historical perspective grows ever more accurate with the passage of time, blessing today's textbook authors with cumulative historical insight. They cannot use historical perspective to defend their treatment of events in the sasha, however. Without historical perspective,

textbook authors appear naked; no particular qualification gives them the right DOWN THE MEMORY HOLE .

to narrate recent events with the same Olympian detachment with which they declaim on events in the

zamani.

Indeed, historical perspective implicitly justifies neglecting the sasha. Historians tell us how we are too close to whichever recent event we are discussing to be able to step back and view it in context. As new material becomes available in archives, they claim, or as the consequences of actions become clearer over time, we can reach a more "objective" assessment. The passage of time does not in itself provide perspective, however. Information is lost as well as gained over time.

At this point we might usefully recall a few changes in perspective noted in earlier chapters. Woodrow Wilson enjoys a dramatically more positive ranking now than in 1920. The improvement did not derive from the discovery of fresh information on his administration but from the ideological needs of the late 1940s and early 1950s. In those years white historians would hardly fault Wilson for segregating the federal government, because no consensus held that racial segregation was wrong. The foremost public issue of that postwar era was not race relations but the containment of communism. During the Cold War our government operated as it did under Wilson, with semideclared wars, executive deception of Congress, and suppression of civil liberties in the name of anticommunism. Wilson's policies, controversial and unpopular in 1920, had become ordinary by the 1950s. Statesmen and historians of the 1950s rejected and even trivialized isolationism. Interested in pushing the United Nations, then thoroughly under U.S. influence, they appreciated Wilson's efforts on behalf of the League of Nations. N. Gordon Levin, Jr., put it neatly: "Ultimately, in the post-World War II period, Wilsonian values would have their complete triumph in the bi-partisan Cold War consensus."" Thus Wilson's improved evaluation in today's textbooks can be attributed largely to the fact that the ideological needs of the 1950s, when Wilson was in the zamani, were different from those of the 1920s, when he was passing into the sasha.

The mistreatment and enslavement of the Caribbean Indians by the Spaniards was noted by Bartolome de las Casas and others while Columbus was still in the sasha. Later, however, Columbus was lionized as a daring man of science who disproved the flat-earth notion and opened a new hemisphere to progress. This nineteenth-century Columbus appealed to a nation concluding three hundred years of

triumphant warfare over Indian nations. But by 1992 Columbus the exploiter had begun receiving equal billing with Columbus the explorer, and many Columbus celebrations drew countercelebrations, often mounted by Native Americans. The “new” Columbus, closer to the Columbus of the sasha, appealed to a nation that had to get along with dozens of former colonies, now new nations. The contrast between the 1892 and 1992 celebrations of Columbus's first voyage again shows the effect of different vantage points.

The Confederate myth of Reconstruction first permeated the historical literature during the nadir of race relations, from 1890 to 1920, and hung on in textbooks until the 1960s. Reconstruction regimes came to be portrayed as illegitimate and corrupt examples of “Negro domination,” Now historians have returned to the view of Reconstruction put forth in earlier histories, written while Republican governments still administered the Southern states. Eric Foner hails the change as due to “objective scholarship and modern experience,” a turn of phrase that concisely links the two key causes. Objective scholarship does exist in history, which is why I risk words like truth and lies. Mere chronological distance did not promote a more accurate depiction of Reconstruction. Because the facts about Reconstruction simply did not suit the “modern experience” of the nadir period, they lay mute during the early decades of the twentieth century, overlooked by most historians. Not until the civil rights movement altered “modern experience” could the facts speak to us.

Historical perspective is thus not a by-product of the passage of time. A more accurate view derives from Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance, which suggests that the social practices of the period when history is written largely determine that history's perspective on the past.29 Objective scholarship must be linked with a modern experience that permits it to prevail. The claim of inadequate historical perspective will not do as an excuse for ignoring the sasha. Historians have no reason other than timidity for avoiding a full and thoughtful exposition of our recent past.

Textbook authors are not solely responsible for the slighting of the recent past in high school history courses. Even if textbooks gave the sasha the space it deserves, most students would have to read about it on their own, because most teachers never ger to the end of the textbook. In her

year-long American history course, the fifth-grade teacher Chris Zajac, subject of Tracy Kidder's Among, Schoolchildren, never gets past Reconstruction! Time is not the only problem. Like publishers, teachers do not want to risk offending parents. Moreover, according to Linda McNeil, most teachers particularly don't want to teach about Vietnam. “Their memories of the Vietnam war era made them wish to avoid topics on which the students were likely to disagree with their views or that would make the students 'cynical' about American institutions.” Therefore the average teacher grants the Vietnam War 0 to 4.5 minutes in the entire school year!

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The Vietnam War isn't nearly as contentious as some other issues from the recent past; today more than two of three adult Americans consider the war to have been morally wrong as well as tactically inept.50 More controversial is the women's movement. Every school district includes parents who strongly affirm traditional sex roles and other parents who do not. Homosexuality is even more taboo as a subject of discussion or learning. Raising the topic of affirmative action leads to angry debates. A negative evaluation of the Carter or Reagan administrations would surely offend some Democratic or Republican patents, respectively, Mel and Norma Gabler, who organize right-wingers to pressure textbook publishers, seek to make labor unions and the National Council of Churches too controversial for authors and publishers even to mention. Since all parents have opinions about events they lived through, teachers and authors may feel they must approach most topics in the sasha with extreme caution. The result is a history of the recent past along the line suggested by Thumper's mom: “Ifyou can't say somethin' nice, don't say nothin' at all.” Unsurprisingly, only 2 to 4 percent of college students say that they had any substantial treatment of the Vietnam War in high school.

When textbooks downplay the sasha, however, they make it hard for students to draw connections between the study of the past, their lives today, and the issues they will face in the future. Politicians across the political spectrum invoked “the lessons of Vietnam” as they debated intervening in Angola, Lebanon, Kuwait, Somalia, and Bosnia. Bumper stickers reading “El Salvador is Spanish for Vietnam” helped block sending U.S. troops to that nation.32 “The lessons of Vietnam” have also been used to inform or mislead discussions about secrecy, the press, how the federal

government operates, and even whether the military should admit gays. Issues raised by the women's movement in the 1970s continue to reverberate through American society, affecting institutions from individual families to the mass media. And so on. High school graduates have a right to enough knowledge about the recent past to participate intelligently in such debates.

“The past is never dead,” wrote William Faulkner. “It's not even past.” The sasha is our most important past, because it is not dead but living-dead. Its theft by textbooks and teachers is the most wicked crime schools perpetrate on high school students, depriving them of perspective about the issues that most affect them. The semi-remembered factoids students carry with them about the Battle of Put-in-Bay or Silent Cal Coolidge do little to help them understand the world into which they move at graduation. That world is still working out sex roles. That world is full of Third World nations with the potential to become “new Vietnams.” That world is marked by social inequality. Leaving out the recent past ensures that students will take away little from their history courses that they can apply to that world.

Florida's Disney World presents an exhibit called “American Adventure,” a twenty-nine-minute history of the United States. The exhibit completely leaves out the Vietnam War, the ghetto riots of the 1960s and 1990s, and anything else troubling about the recent past," The compressed and bland accounts of the recent past in American history textbooks show a similar failure of nerve on the part of authors, publishers, and many teachers. High school students deserve better than Disney World history, especially since their textbooks are by no means as much fun as the amusement park.

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God has not been preparing the English speaking and Teutonic peoples for a thousand years for nothing. . . . He has given us the spirit of progress to overwhelm the forces of reaction throughout the earth. He has made us adept in government that we may administer government among savage and senile peoples. . . . And of all our race He has marked the American people as His chosen nation to finally lead in the redemption of the world.

Sen. Albert J. Beveriage, 19001 Americans see history as a straight line and themselves standing at the cutting edge of it as representatives for all mankind.

Frances FrtzGera/d2 The study of economic growth is too serious to be left to the economists.

£. J. Mishan It is becoming increasingly apparent that we shall not have the benefits of this world for much longer. The imminent and expected destruction of the life cycle of world ecology can only be prevented by a radical shift in outlook from our present naive conception of this world as a testing ground to a more mature view of trie universe as a comprehensive matrix of life forms. Making this shift m viewpoint is essentially religious, not economic or political.

Vine Deloria, Jr.

Lies My Teacher Told Me

10. Progress Is Our Most Important Product

Steadfast reader, we are about to do something no high school American history class has ever accomplished in the annals of American education: reach the end of the textbook. What final words do American history courses impart to their students? TheAmerican Tradition assures students “that the American tradition remains strongstrong enough to meet the many challenges that lie ahead.“ ”If these values are those on which most Americans can agree,“ says The American Adventure, ”the American adventure will surely continue.“ ”Most Americans remained optimistic about the nation's future. They were convinced that their free institutions, their great natural wealth, and the genius of the American people would enable the US. to continue to beas it always has beenTHE LAND OF PROMISE,” Land of Promise concludes.

Even textbooks that don't end with their titles close with the same vapid cheer. “The American spirit surged with vitality as the nation headed toward the close of the twentieth century,” the authors of The American Pageant assure us, ignoring opinion polls that suggest the opposite. Life and Liberty climbs further out on this hollow limb; “America will have a great role to play in these future events. What this nation does depends on the people in it.” “Problems lie ahead, certainly,” predicts American Adventures. “But so do opportunities.” The American people “need only the will and the commitment to meet the new challenges of the future,” according to Triumph oftheAmericanNation. In short, all we must do to prepare for the morrow is keep our collective chin up.

As usual, such content-free unanimity signals that a social archetype lurks nearby. This one, the archetype of progress, bursts forth in full flower on the textbooks' last pages but has been germinating from their opening chapters.

For centuries, Americans viewed their own history as a demonstration of the idea of progress. As Thomas Jefferson put it:

Let the philosophical observer commence a journey from

the savages of the Rocky Mountains eastwards towards our seacoast. These he would observe in the earliest stage of association, living under no law but that of nature . . . He would next find those on our frontiers in the pastoral state, raising domestic animals to supply the defects of hunting, . . . and so in his progress he would meet the gradual shades of improving man until he would reach his, as yet, most improved siate in our seaport towns. This, in fact, is equivalent to a survey, in time, of the progress of man from the infancy of creation to the present day. And where this progress will stop no one can say.s The idea of progress dominated American culture in the nineteenth century and was still being celebrated in Chicago at the Century of Progress Exposition in 1933. As recently as the 1950s, more was still assumed to be better. Every midwestern town displayed civic pride in signs marking the city limits: “Welcome to Decatur, Illinois, Pop. 65,000 and growing.” Growth meant progress and progress provided meaning, it) some basic but unthinking way. In Washington the secretary of commerce routinely celebrated when our nation hit each new According to American History, “Westward the Course ol Empire Takes its Way” has been reproduced in more American histories than any other picture by Currier and Ives. StereotyRically contrasting “primitive” Native hunters and fishers with bustling white settlers, the picture suggests that progress doomed the Indian, so we need not looK closely today at the process of dispossession.

In the 1950s a graphics firm redesigned the symbol for Explorer Scouting to be more “up to date.” The new symbol's onward ant) upward thrust perfectly represents the archetype of progress.

milestone170,000,000, 185,000,000, etc.on his “population clock.”6 We boasted that America's marvelous economic system had given the United States “72 percent of the world's automobiles, 61 percent of the world's telephones, and 92 percent of the world's bathtubs,” and all this with only 6 percent of the world's population.7 The future looked brighter yet: most Americans believed their children would inherit a better planet and enjoy fuller lives.

This is the America in which most textbook authors grew up and the America they still try to sell to students today. Three textbooks offer appendixes that trace recent trends, all onwards and upwards. These efforts are undistinguished. They do not use constant dollars, for one thing, so their bar

graphs of rapidly rising family income or health care expenditures show far more “progress” (if spending more on health care is progress) than occurred. The American Pageant records the steep increase (flattening in about 1980) in number of automobiles in the United States, percentage of Americans homes with television sets, and the like. No textbook charts phenomena that might be negative, such as frequency of air pollution alerts, increased reliance on imported oil, or declining real wages.

Perhaps textbooks authors do not question the notion that bigger is better because the idea of progress conforms with the way Americans like to think about education: ameliorative, leading step by step to opportunity for individuals and progress tor the whole society. The ideology of progress also provides hope for the future. Certainly most Americans want to believe that their society has been, on balance, a boon and not a curse to mankind and to the planet8 History textbooks go even further to imply that simply by participating in society, Americans contribute to a nation that is constantly progressing and remains the hope of the world. The closing sentence of The American Pageant states, “As the twentieth century approaches its sunset, the people of the United States can still proudly claim in the words of Lincoln, that they and their heritage represent 'the last best hope of earth.'” Thus the idea of American exceptionalism-the United States as the most moral country in the worldwhich starts in our textbooks with the Pilgrims, gets projected into the future.

Faith in progress has played various functions in society and in American history textbooks. The faith has promoted the status quo in the most literal sense, for it proclaims that to progress we must simply do more of the same. This belief has been particularly useful to the upper class, because Americans could be persuaded to ignore the injustice of social class if they thought the economic pie kept getting bigger for all. The idea of progress also fits in with Social Darwinism, which implies that the lower class is lower owing to its own fault. Progress as an ideology has been intrinsically amirevolutionary: because things are getting better all the time, everyone should believe in the system. Portraying America so optimistically also helps textbooks withstand attacks by ultrapatriotic critics in Texas and other textbook adoption states.

Internationally, referring to have-not countries as

“developing nations” has helped the “developed nations” avoid facing the injustice of worldwide stratification. In reality “development” has been making Third World nations poorer, compared to the First World. Per capita income in the First World was five times that in the Third World in 1850, ten times in 1960, and fourteen times by 1970,“ The vocabulary of progress remains relentlessly hopeful, however, with regard to the ”undeveloped.“ As E. J. Mishan put it, ”Complacency is suffused over the globe, by referring to these destitute and sometimes desperate countries by the fatuous nomenclature of “developing nations,'”10 In the nineteenth century, progress provided an equally splendid rationale for imperialism. Europeans and Americans saw themselves as performing governmental services for and utilizing the natural resources of natives in distant lands, who were too backward to do it themselves.

Gradually the archetype of progress has been losing its grip. In the last quarter-century, the intellectual community in the United States has largely abandoned the idea. Opinion polls show that the general public too has been losing its faith that the future is automatically getting better. Reporting this new climate of opinion, the editors of a 1982 symposium entitled “Progress and Its Discontents” put it this way: “Future historians will probably record that from the mid-twentieth century on, it was difficult for anyone to retain faith in the idea of inevitable and continuing progress.”

Probably not even textbook authors still believe that bigger is necessarily better. No one celebrates higher populations.12 Today, rather than boast of our consumption, we are more likely to lament our waste, as in [his passage by Donella H. Meadows, co-author of The Limits to Growth: “In terms of spoiling the environment and using world resources, we are the world's most irresponsible and dangerous citizens,” Each American born in the 1970s will throw out 10,000 noreturn bottles and almost 20,000 cans while generating 126 tons of garbage and 9.8 tons of paniculate air pollution. And that's just the tip of" the trashberg, because every ton ofwaste at the consumer end has also required five tons at the manufacturing stage and even more at the site of initial resource extraction.

In some ways, bigger still seems to equal better. When we compare ourselves to others around us, having more seems to bring happiness, for earning a lot of money or driving an expensive car implies that one is a more valued member of

society. Sociologists routinely find positive correlations between income and happiness. Over time, however, and in an absolute sense, more may not mean happier. Americans believed themselves to be less happy in 1970 than in 1957, yet they used much more energy and raw materials per capita in 1970.

The 1973 Arab oil embargo precipitated the new climate of opinion, for it showed America's vulnerability to economic and even geological factors over which we have little control. The new pessimism was exemplified by the enormous popularity of that year's ecocidal bestseller, The Limits to Growth.14 Writing the next year, Robert Heilbroner noted the new pessimism: “There is a question in the air . . . 'Is there hope for man?'”15 Robert Nisbet, who thinks that the idea of progress “has done more good over a 2500-year period . . . than any other single idea in Western history,”16 nonetheless agrees that the idea is in twilight. This change did not take place all at once. Intellectuals had been challenging the idea of progress for some time, dating back to The Decline ofche West, published during World War I, in which Oswald Spengler suggested that Western civilization was beginning a profound and inevitable downturn." The war itself, the Great Depression, Stalinism, the Holocaust, and World War II shook Western belief in progress at its foundations.

Developments in social theory further undermined the idea of progress by making Social Darwinism intellectually obsolete. Modern anthropologists no longer believe that our society is “ahead of” or “fitter than” so-called “primitive” societies. They realize that our society is more complex than its predecessors but do not rank our religions higher than “primitive” religions or consider our kinship system superior. Even our technology, though assuredly more advanced, may not be better in that it may not meet human needs over the long term.

Another key justification for our belief in progress had come from biological theory. Biologists used to see natural evolution as the survival of the fittest.

By 1973 a much more complex view of trie development of organisms had swept the field, “Life is not a tale of progress,” according to Stephen Jay Gould. “It is, rather, a story of intricate branching and wandering, with momentary survivors adapting to changing local environments, not approaching cosmic or engineering perfection.”

Since textbooks do not discuss ideas, it is no surprise that they fail to address the changes in American thinking resulting from World War I, World War II, the Holocaust, or Stalinism, let alone from developments in anthropological or biological theory. By 1973, however, another problem with progress was becoming apparent: the downside risks of our increasing dominance over nature. Environmental problems have grown more ominous every year.

Most books at least mention the energy crises caused by the oil embargo of 1973 and the Iran-Iraq War in 1979. No worries, however: textbook authors imply that both crises found immediate solutions. “As a result” of the 1973 embargo, Triumph ofibe American Nation tells us, “Nixon announced a program to make the United States independent of all foreign countries for its energy requirements by the early 198s.” Ten pages later, in response to gas rationing in 1979, “Carter set forth another energy plan, calling for a massive program to develop synthetic fuels. The long-range goal of the plan was to cut importation of oil in half.” No mention in 1979 of Nixon's 1973 plan, which had failed so abjectly that our dependence on foreign oil had spiraled upward, not downward.20 No mention that Congress never even passed most of Carter's 1979 plan, inadequate as it was. Virtually all the textbooks adopt this trouble-free approach. “By the end of the Carter administration, the energy crisis had eased off,” Land of Promise reassures its readers. “Americans were building and buying smaller cars.” “People gradually began to use less gasoline and conserve energy,” echoes TheAmerican Tradition.

If only it were that simple! Between 1950 and 1975 world fuel consumption doubled, oil and gas consumption tripled, and the use of electricity grew almost sevenfold.21 If our sources of energy are not infinite, which seems likely since we live on a finite planet, then at some point we will run up against shortages. A century ago farming in America was energy self-sufficient: livestock provided the fertilizer and tillage power, farm families did the work of planting and weeding, wood heated the house, wind pumped the water, and photosynthesis grew the crops. Today American farming relies on enormous amounts ofoil, not only for tractors and trucks and air conditioning, but also for fertilizers and herbicides. Given these circumstances, most social and natural scientists concluded from the 1973 energy crisis that we cannot blithely maintain our economic growth forever.

“Anyone having the slightest familiarity with the physics of heat, energy, and matter,” wrote Mishan in 1977, “will realize that, in terms of historical time, the end of economic growth, as we currently experience it, cannot be that far off.”J2 This is largely because of the awesome power of cornpound interest. Economic growth at three percent, a conventional standard, means that the economy doubles every quarter-century, typically doubling society's use of raw materials, expenditures of energy, and generation of waste.

The energy crises of 1973 and 1979 pointed to the difficulty that capitalism, a marvelous system of production, was never designed to accommodate shortage. For demand to exceed supply is supposed to be good for capitalism, leading to increased production and often to lower costs. Oil, however, is not really produced but extracted. In a way it is rationed by the oil companies and OPEC from an unknown but finite pool. Thus the oil companies, which we habitually perceive as competing capitalist producers, might more accurately be viewed as keepers of the commons.

America has seen commons problems before. Imagine a colonial New England town in which each household kept a cow. Every morning, a family member would take the cow to the common town pasture, where it would join other cows and graze ad day under the supervision of a cowherd paid by the town. An affluent family might benefit from buying a second cow; any excess milk and butter they could sell to cowless sailors and merchants. Expansion of this sort could go on only for a finite period, however, before the common pasture was hopelessly overgrazed. What was in the short-term interest of the individual family was not in the long-term interest of the community. If we compare contemporary oil companies with cowholdtng colonial families, we see that new forms of governmental regulations, analogous to the regulated use of the commons, may be necessary to assure there will be a commonsin this case, an oil poolfor our children.

The commons issue afreets our society in other ways. I write this chapter within sight of Chesapeake Bay in a year when the crab and oyster harvests are unprecedentedly low. A catch of 20,000,000 bushels in 1892 and 3,500,000 in 1982 fell to just 166,000 bushels in 1992. Fisherfolk have responded the way people usually do when their standard of living is imperiled: work harder. This means redoubling their efforts to take more of the few crabs and oysters still out

there. Although this tactic may benefit an individual family, it cannot but wreak disaster on the commons. The problem of the bay is amplified in the oceans. The United Nations is struggling to develop a global system “to manage and repropagate the fish that are still left.” Since international waters are involved,

however, negotiations may not succeed until after many species have been made extinct.

Because the economy has become global, the commons now encompasses the entire planet. If we consider that around the world humans owned ten times as many cars in 1990 as in 1950, no sane observer would predict that such a proportional increase could or should continue for another 40 years.25 Quantitatively, the average U.S. citizen consumes the same resources as ten average world citizens or twenty-five residents of India.26 Our continued economic development coexists in some tension with a corollary of the archetype of progress: the notion that America's cause is the cause ofall humankind. Thus our economic leadership is very different from our political leadership. Politically, we can hope other nations will put in place our forms of democracy and respect for civil liberties. Economically, we can only hope other nations will never achieve our standard of living, for if they did, the earth would become a desert. Economically, we are the bane, not the hope of the world. Since the planet is finite, as we expand our economy we make it less likely that less developed nations can expand theirs.

Almost every day brings new reasons for ecological concern, from deforestation at the equator to ozone holes at the poles. Cancer rates climb and we don't know why." We have no way even to measure the full extent of human impact on the earth. The average sperm count in healthy human males around the world has dropped by nearly 50 percent over the past fifty years. If environmentally caused, this is no laughing matter, for sperm have only to decline in a straight line for another fifty years and we will have wiped out humankind without even knowing how we did it!28 We were similarly unaware for years that killing mosquitoes with DDT was wiping out birds of prey around the globe. Our increasing power makes it increasingly possible that humankind will make the planet uninhabitable by accident.

All these considerations imply that more of the same economic development and nation-state governance that

brought us this far may not guide us to a livable planet in the long run. At some point in the future, perhaps before readers of today's high school textbooks pass their fiftieth birthdays, industrialized nations including the United States may have to move toward steady-state economies in their consumption of energy and raw materials. Getting to zero economic growth involves another form of the problem of the commons, however, for no country wants to be first to achieve a no-growth economy, just as no individual family finds it in its interest to stop with one cow. A new international mechanism may be required, one hard even to envision today. Heilbroner is pessimistic: “No substantial voluntary diminution of growth, much less a planned reorganization of society, is today even remotely imaginable.“29 If tomorrow citizens must imagine diminished growth, we cannot rest easily, knowing that most high school history courses do nothing whatever to prepare Americans of the future to think imaginatively about the problem. Continued unthinking allegiance to the idea of progress in our textbooks can only be a deterrent, blinding students to the need for change, thus making change that much more difficult. David Donald characterizes the ”incurable optimism“ of American history courses as ”not merely irrelevant but dangerous,” In this sense, our environmental crisis is an educational problem to which American history courses contribute.

Edward O. Wilson divides those who write on environmental issues into two camps; environmentalists and exceptionalists.!1 Most scholars and writers, including Wilson, are of the former persuasion. On the other side stand a relative handful of political scientists, economists, and natural scientists, several associated with right-wing think tanks, who have mounted important counterarguments to the doomsaying environmentalists. Julian Simon, Herman Kahn, and others compare today's world to the world of our ancestors and argue that although modern societies have more power to harm the planet, they also have more power to set the environment right. Hence modern technology may exempt us from environmental pressures. The exceptionalists point out that recovery time after natural disasters such as earthquakes or manmade disasters such as World War II is much shorter today than in the previous century, owing in part to the ability of our large bureaucratic organizations to mobilize information and coordinate enormous undertakings.

Human life expectancy, one measure of the quality of life, continues to lengthen. Herbert London, who titled his book Why Are They Lying to Our Children? because he believes that teachers and textbooks overemphasize the perils of economic growth, points out that more food is available today than twenty years ago.

Such optimism gives economist Mishan faint comfort: “From the mere fact that humanity has survived to the present, no hope for the future can be salvaged. The human race can perish only once.”3 In short, we are in a huge debate. If the majority of books and articles and the arguments in this chapter seem skewed to favor the environmentalists, perhaps the potential downside risk if they are right makes this bias appropriate. But for textbook authors simply to join the chorus of doomsayers without presenting arguments from the exceptionalists would be intellectually negligent. Authors could show trends in the past that suggest we face catastrophe and other trends that suggest solutions. Doing so would encourage students to use evidence from history to reach their own conclusions.

History reveals many previously vital societies, from the Mayans and Easter Island to Haiti and the Canaries, that irreparably damaged their ecosystems.34 “Considering the beauty of the land,” Christopher Columbus wrote on first seeing Haiti, “there must be gain to be got.” Columbus and the Spanish transformed the island biologically by introducing diseases, plants, and livestock. The pigs, hunting dogs, cows, and horses propagated quickly, causing tremendous environmental damage. By 1550 the “thousands upon thousands of pigs” in the Americas had all descended from the eight pigs that Columbus brought over in 1493. “Although these islands had been, since God made the earth, prosperous and full of people lacking nothing they needed,” a Spanish settler wrote in 1518, after the Europeans' arrival “they were laid waste, inhabited only by wild animals and birds.”" Later, sugarcane monoculture replaced gardening in the name of quick profit, thereby impoverishing the soil. More recently, population pressure has caused Haitians and Dominicans to farm the island's steep hillsides, resulting in erosion of the topsoil. Today this island ecosystem that formerly supported a large population in relative equilibrium is in far worse condition than when Columbus first saw it. This sad story may be a prophesy for the future, now that modern technology has the power to make of the entire earth

a Haiti.

On the other hand, Julian Simon has pointed out how most short-term predictions of shortages in everything from whale oil in the last century to food in the 1970s to silver in the 1990s have been confuted by new technological developments.56 Moreover, environmental damage has been undone: some American rivers that were deemed hopelessly polluted forty years ago are now fit for fish and human swimmers. Human activity has reforested South Korea.57 Textbooks might also present these adaptive capacities of modern society.

Ironically, textbooks that assure us that everything will come out right in the end do not report any of the reasoning or evidence marshaled by Simon and his ilk. Instead they exhort students to accept on faith that they need not worry much about where we are going.33 Their endorsement of progress is as shallow as General Electric's, a company that claims, “Progress is our most important product,” but whose ecological irresponsibility earned it a place on Fortunes list of the ten worst corporate environmental offenders.59 Not one textbook brings up the whale oil lesson, the Haiti lesson, or any other inference from the past that might bear on the question of progress and the environment. In sum, although this debate may be the most important of our time, no hint of its seriousness seeps into our history textbooks.

If textbook authors revised their closing pages to jettison the unthinking devotion to progress, their final chapters would sit in uneasy dissonance with earlier chapters. Their tone throughout would have to change. From their titles on, American history textbooks are celebratory, and the idea of progress legitimates the celebration. Textbook authors present our nation as getting ever better in all areas, from race relations to transportation. The traditional portrayal of Reconstruction as a period of Yankee usurpation and Negro debauchery fits with the upward curve of progress, for if relations were bad in Reconstruction, perhaps not as bad as in slavery but surely worse than what came later, then we can imagine that race relations have gradually been getting better. However, the facts about Reconstruction compel us to acknowledge that in many ways race relations in this country have yet to return to the point reached in, say, 1870. In that year, to take a small but symbolic example, A. T, Morgan, a white state senator from Hinds County, Mississippi, married Carrie Highgate, a black woman from New York, and was

reflected.40 Today this probably could not happen, not in Hinds County, Mississippi, or in many counties throughout the United States. Nonetheless, the archetype of progress prompts many white Americans to conclude that black Americans have no legitimate claim on our attention today because the problem of race relations has surely been ameliorated.

A. T. Morgan's marriage is hard for us to make sense of, because Americans have so internalized the cultural archetype ofprogress that by now we have a built-in tendency to assume that we are more tolerant, more sophisticated, more, well, progressive than we were in the past. Even a trivial illustration Abraham Lincoln's beard-can teach us otherwise. In I860 a clean-shaven Lincoln won the presidency; in 1864, with a beard, he was reelected. Could that happen nowadays? Today many institutions, from investment banking firms to Brigham Young University, are closed to white males with facial hair. No white presidential or Supreme Court candidate has ventured even a mustache since Tom Dewey in 1948. Beards may not in themselves be signs of progress, although mine has subtly improved my thinking, but we have reached an arresting state of intolerance when the huge Disney corporation, founded by a man with a mustache, will not allow any employee to wear one. On a more profound note, consider that Lincoln was also the last American president who was not a member of a Christian denomination when taking office. Americans may not be becoming more tolerant; we may only think we are. Thus the ideology of progress amounts to a chronological form of ethnocentrism.

Not only does the siren song of progress lull us into thinking that everything now is more “advanced,” it also tempts us to conclude that societies long ago were more primitive than they may have been. Progress underlay the various unilinear evolutionary schemes into which our society used to classify The United States was founded in a spirit of dominion over nature. “My family, I believe, have cut down more trees in America than any other name!” boasted John Adams. Benjamin Lincoln, a Revolutionary War general, spoke for most Americans of his day when he observed in 1792, “Civilization directs us to remove as fast as possible that natural growth from the lands.” The Adams-Lincoln mode of thought did make possible America's rapid expansion to the Pacific, the Chicago school of architecture,

and Henry Ford's assembly line. Our growing environmental awareness casts a colder light on these accomplishments, however. Since 1950 more than 25 percent of the remaining forests on the planet have been cut down. Recognizing that trees are the lungs of the planet, few people still think that this process represents progress.

peoples and cultures: savagery-barbarism-civilization, for example, or gath ering-hunting-horticultural-agricultural-industrial. Under the influence of these schemes, scholars completely misconceived “primitive” humans as living lives that, as Hobbes put it, were “nasty, brutish, and short,” Only “higher” cultures were conceived of as having sufficient leisure to develop art, literature, or religion.

Anthropologists have long known better. “Despite the theories traditionally taught in high school social studies,” pointed out anthropologist Peter Farb, “the truth is, the more primitive the society, the more leisured its way of life.”42 Thus “primitive” cultures were hardly “nasty.” As to “brutish,” we might recall the comparison of the peaceful Arawaks on Haiti and the Spanish conquistadors who subdued them. “Short” is also problematic. Before encountering the diseases brought by Europeans and Africans, many people in Australia, the Pacific islands, and the Americas probably enjoyed remarkable longevity, particularly when compared with European and African city dwellers. “They live a long life and rarely fall sick,” observed Giovanni da Verrazano, after whom the Verrazano Narrows and bridge in New York City are named.4J “The Indians be of lusty and healthful bodies not experimentally knowing the Catalogue of those health-wasting diseases which are incident to other Countries,” according to a very early New England colonist, who apparently ignored the recently introduced European diseases that were then laying waste the Native Americans. He reported that the Indians lived to “three-score, four-score, some a hundred years, before the world's universal summoner cites them to the craving Crave,”44 In Maryland another early settler marveled that many Indians were great-grandfathers, while in England few people survived to become grandparents.45 The first Europeans to meet Australian aborigines noted a range of ages that implied a goodly number lived to be seventy. For that matter, Psalm 90 in the Bible implies that thousands of years ago most people in the Middle East lived to be seventy: “The years of our lives are three score and ten, and if by reason of strength

they be four score, yet is their labor sorrow."

Besides fostering ignorance of past societies, belief in progress makes students oblivious to merit in present-day societies other than our own. To conclude that other cultures have achieved little about which we need to know is a natural side effect of believing our society the most progressive. Anthropology professors despair of the severe ethnocentrism shown by many first-year college students. William A, Haviland, author of a popular anthropology textbook, says that in his experience the possibility that "some of the things that we aspire to todayequal treatment of men and women, to cite but one examplehave in fact been achieved t>y some other peoples simply has never occurred to the average beginning undergraduate,"47 Few high schools offer anthropology courses, and fewer than one American in ten ever takes a college anthropology course, so we can hardly count on anthropology to reduce ethnocentrism. High school history and social studies courses could help open students to ideas from other cultures. That does not happen, however, because the idea of progress saturates these courses from Columbus to their final words. Therefore they can only promote, not diminish, ethnocentrism. Yet ethnocentric faith in progress in Western culture has had disastrous consequences. People who believed in their society as the vanguard of the future, the most progressive on earth, have been all too likely to indulge in such excessive cruelties as the Pequot massacre, Stalin's purges, the Holocaust, or the Great Leap Forward.

Rather than assuming that our ways must be best, textbook authors would do well to challenge students to think about practices from the American way of birth to the American way of death. Some elements of modem medicine, for instance, ate inarguably more effective and based on far better theory than previous medicines. On the other hand, our "scientific" antigravity way of birth, which dominated delivery rooms in the United States from about 1930 to 1970, shows the influence of the idea of progress at its most laughable. The analogy for childbirth was an operation: the doctor anesthetized the mother and removed the anesthetized infant like a gall bladder,48 Even as late as 1992, only half of all women who gave birth in U.S. hospitals breastfed their babies, even though we now know, as "primitive" societies never forgot, that human milk, not bovine milk or "formula," is designed for human babies.49 IF history textbooks

relinquished their blind devotion to the archetype of progress, they could invite readers to assess technologies as to which have truly been progressive. Defining progress would itself become problematic. Alternative forms of social organization, made possible or perhaps even necessary by technological and economic developments, could also be considered. Today's children may see the decline of the nation-state, for instance, because the problem of the planetary commons may force planetary decision-making or because growing tribalism may fragment many nations from within.5" The closing chapters of history textbooks might become inquiry exercises, directing students toward facts and readings on both sides of such issues. Surely such an approach would prepare students for their six decades of life after high school better than today's mindlessly upbeat textbook endings,

Thoughtfulness about such matters as the quality oflife is often touted as a goal of education in the humanities, but history textbooks sweep such topics under the brightly colored rug of progress. Textbooks manifest no real worries even about the environmental downside of our economic and scientific institutions. Instead, they stress the fortunate adequacy of our government's reaction. “As time went on, scientists discovered more about the effects of pollutants on the environment, and people became more concerned with environmental health,” says The American Tradition. “In response, Congress passed the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.” Textbook authors seem much happier telling of the governmental responsemainly the creation of the Environmental Protection Agencythan discussing any continuing environmental problems. Life and Liberty goes the furthest; it prophesies, “During the next 20 years, the environment will become a major political issue,” and goes on to discuss water shortages, acid rain, and tropical deforestation. But even Lift and Liberty ends its discussion: “Let us be optimistic. Our difficulties of energy and resource shortages will be solved within the next half century.” The authors then speculate happily about such wonders as shorter work weeks, robot workers, lunar colonies, and synthetic foods.

“The American people have reason to move into the future with confidence,” Triumph of the American Nation assures students in its final paragraph, for “the same scientific genius and engineering talents that unknowingly

created many of the as yet unsolved problems remain available to solve them."51 Students find these words about as inspirational as the photograph that accompanies them: John S. Herrington in a business suit. Herrington, you remembersurely you remember?-was secretary of energy in the Reagan administration. Many students no longer believe that Herrington or all our "scientific genius and engineering talents" will save us. According to a 1993 survey, children are much more concerned about the environment than are their parents,52 In the late 1980s about one high school senior in three thought that nuclear or biological annihilation will probably be the fate of all mankind within their lifetimes,53 "I have talked with my friends about this," a student of mine wrote in her class journal. "We all agree that we feel as if we are not going to finish our adult lives." These students had all taken American history courses, but the textbooks' regimen of good cheer does not seem to have rubbed off on them. Students know when they are being conned. They sense that underneath the mindless optimism is a defensiveness that rings hollow. Or maybe they simply never reached the cheerful endings of their textbooks.

Probably the principal effect of the textbook whitewash of environmental issues in favor of the idea of progress is to persuade high school students that American history courses are not appropriate places to bring up the future course of American history.54 What is perhaps the key issue of the day will have to be discussed in other classes-maybe science or healtheven though it is foremost a social rather than biological or health issue. Meanwhile, back in history class, more bland, data-free assurances that things are getting better.

E.]. Mishan has suggested that feeding students rosy tales of automatic progress helps keep them passive, for it presents the future as a process over which they have no control." I don't believe this is why textbooks end as they do, however. Their upbeat endings may best be understood as ploys by publishers who hope that nationalist optimism will get their books adopted. Such endings really amount to concessions of defeat, however. By implying that no real questions about our future need be asked and no real thinking about trends in our history need be engaged in, textbook authors concede implicitly that our history has no serious bearing on our future. We can hardly fault students for concluding that the study ofhistory is irrelevant.

I do not know if there is any other field of knowledge which suffers so badly as history from the sheer blind repetitions that occur year after year, and from book to book.

Herbert ButterfieW When you're publishing a book, if there's something that is controversial, it's better to take it out.

Holt, Rinehart, and Winston representative There is no other country in the world where there is such a large gap between trie sophisticated understanding of some professional historians and the basic education given by teachers.

Marc Ferro

Lies My Teacher Told Me

11. Why Is History Taught Like This?

Ten chapters have shown that textbooks supply irrelevant and even erroneous details, while omitting pivotal questions and facts in their treatments of issues ranging from Columbus's second voyage to the possibility of impending ecocide. We have also seen that history textbooks offer students no practice in applying their understanding ofthe past to present concerns, hence no basis for thinking rationally about anything in the future. Reality gets lost as authors stray further and further from the primary sources and even the secondary literature. Textbooks rarely present the various sides of historical controversies and almost never reveal to students the evidence on which each side bases its position. The textbooks are unscholarly in other ways. Of the twelve I studied, only the two inquiry textbooks contain any footnotes.4 Six of the textbooks even deny students a bibliography.

Despite criticisms by scholars, from Frances FitzGerald to Diane Ravitch and Harriet Tyson-Bernstein,5 new editions of old texts come out year after year, largely unchanged. Year after year, clones appear with new authors but nearly identical covers, titles, and contents. What explains such appalling uniformity? The textbooks must be satisfying somebody.

Publishers produce textbooks with several audiences in mind. One is their intended readers: students' characteristics, as publishers perceive them, particularly affect reading level and page layout. Historians and professors of education are another audience, perhaps two audiences. Teachers comprise another. Conceptions of the general public also enter publishers' thinking, since public opinion influences adoption committees and since parents represent a potential interest group that publishers seek not to arouse. Some of these groups have not been shy about what they want textbooks to do. In 1925 the American Legion declaimed that the ideal textbook:

must inspire the children with patriotism. ... must be careful to tell the truth optimistically. . . .

must dwell on failure only for its value as a moral lesson,

must speak chiefly of success must give each State and Section full space and value for the achievements of each.

Shirley Engle and Anna Ochoa are longtime luminaries of social studies education who in 1986 voiced their recommendations for textbooks. From their vantage point, the ideal textbook should:

confront students with important questions and problems for which answers are not readily available;

be highly selective; be organized around an important problem in society that is to be studied in depth; utilize . . . data from a variety of sources such as history, the social sciences, literature, journalism, and from students' first-hand experiences.'

Today's textbooks hew closely to the American Legion line and disregard the recommendations of Engle and Ochoa. Why?

Is the secondary literature in history to blame? We can hardly expect textbook authors to return to primary sources and dig out facts that are truly obscure. A few decades back, the secondary literature in history was quite biased. Until World War II history, much more than the other social sciences, was overtly anti-Semitic and antiblack. According to Peter Novick, whose book That Noble Dream is probably the best account of the history profession in this century, looking at every white college and university in America, exactly one black was ever employed to teach history before I945!8 Most historians were males from privileged white families. They wrote with blinders on. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., found himself able to write an entire book on rhe presidency of Andrew Jackson without ever mentioning perhaps the foremost issue Jackson dealt with as president: the removal of Indians from the Southeast. What's more, Schlesinger's book won the Pulitzer prize!'

These days, however, the secondary literature in American history is much more comprehensive. About the plagues, for example, Herbert U Williams wrote “The Epidemic of the Indians of New England, 1616-1620,” way back in 1909, and Esther W. Stearn and Allen E. Stearn wrote The Effect ofSrndUpnx on the Destiny of the Amerindian in 1945. P. M. Ashburn's classic The Ranks of Death: A Medical History ofthe Conquest ofAmerica came out in 1947. In 1 John Duffy wrote “Smallpox and the Indians in the American Colonies.”“1 For that matter, the most famous of all primary sources on the Pilgrims, William Bradford's Of Plimoth

Plantation, clearly discloses the plagues. So we cannot excuse history textbooks on the grounds that the historical literature is inadequate. The facts about Helen Keller are hardly obscure, either. No dusty newspaper archives need be searched. The truth about W oodrow W ilson's interventions and his racism has also been available in scholarly works for decades, although most biographies of the man ignore it. Indeed, every chapter of this book has been based on commonly available research. Competent historians will find nothing new here. The information is all there, in the secondary literature, but has not made its way into our textbooks, media, or teachertraining programs and therefore hasn't reached our schools. As a consequence, according to comparative historian Marc Ferro, the United States has wound up with the largest gap of any country in the world between what historians know and what the rest of us are taught."

Could these omissions be a question of professional judgment? Authors cannot include every event. The past is immense. No book claims to be complete. Decisions must be made. What is important? What is appropriate for a given age level? Perhaps teachers should devote no time at all to Helen Keller, no matter how heroic she was.

But when we look at what textbooks do includewhen we contemplate the minute details, some of them false, that they foist upon us about Columbus, fot example-we have to think again. Constraints of time and space cannot be causing textbooks to leave out any discussion of what Columbus did with the Americas or how Europe came to dominate the world, since these issues are among the most vital in all the broad sweep ofthe past.

Perhaps an upper-class conspiracy is to blame. Perhaps we are all dupes, manipulated by elite white male capitalists who orchestrate how history is written as part of their scheme to perpetuate their own power and privilege at the expense of the rest of us. Certainly high school history textbooks are so similar that they look like they might all have been produced by the same executive committee of the bourgeoisie. In 1984 George Orwell was dear about who determines the way history is written: "Who controls the present controls the past."

The symbolic representation of a society's past is particularly important in stratified societies. The United States is stratified, of course, by social class, by race, and by

gender. Some sociologists think that social inequality motivates people, prompting harder work and more innovative performance. Inequality is also intrinsically unfair, however, because those with more money, status, and influence use their advantage to get still more, for themselves and their children. In a society marked by inequality, people who have endured less-than-equal opportunities may become restive. Members of favored groups may become ashamed ofthe unfairness, unable to defend it to the oppressed or even to themselves. To maintain a stratified system, it is terribly important to control how people think about that system. Marx advanced this analysis under the rubric false consciousness. How people think about the past is an important part of their consciousness. If members of the elite come to think that their privilege was historically justified and earned, it will be hard to persuade them to yield opportunity to others. If members of deprived groups come to think that their deprivation is their own fault, then there will be no need to use force or violence to keep them in their places.

"Textbooks offer an obvious means of realizing hegemony in education," according to William L. Griffen and John Marciano, who analyzed textbook treatment of the Vietnam War,

By hegemony we refer specifically to the influence that dominant classes or groups exercise by virtue of their control of ideological institutions, such as schools, that shape perception on such vital issues as the Vietnam War. .. . Within history tents, for example, the omission of crucial facts and viewpoints limits profoundly the ways in which students come to view history events. Further, through their one-dimensionality textbooks shield students from intellectual encounters with their world that would sharpen their critical abilities.

Here, in polite academic language, Griffen and Marciano tell us that controlling elements of our society keep crucial facts from us to keep us ignorant and stupid. Most scholars of education share this perspective, often referred to as "critical theory."14 Jonathan Kozol is of this school when he writes, "School is in business to produce reliable people."1 Paulo Freire of Brazil puts it this way: "It would be extremely naive to expect the dominant classes to develop a type of education that would enable subordinate classes to perceive social injustices critically."16 Henry Giroux, Freire's leading

disciple in the United States, maintains, “The dominant culture actively functions to suppress the development of a critical historical consciousness among the populace.”" David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot tell us when this all started: between 1890 and 1920 businessmen came to have by far a greater impact on public education than any other occupational group or stratum.18 Some writers on education even conclude that upper-class control makes real improvement impossible. In a critique of educational reform initiatives, Henry M. Levin stated, “The educational system will always be applied toward serving the role of cultural transmission and preserving the status quo.”“ ”The public schools we have today are what the powerful and the considerable have made of them,“ wrote Walter Karp. ”They will not be redeemed by trifling reforms.

These writers on education take their cue from an even weightier school of thought in social science, the power elite theorists. This school has shown that an upper class does exist in America, whose members can be found at elegant private clubs, gatherings of the Trilateral Commission, and board meetings of the directors of the multinational corporations. Rich capitalists control all three major TV networks, most newspapers, and all the textbook-publishing companies, and thus possess immense power to frame the way we talk and think about current events,

Nevertheless, I wonder whether it is appropriate to lay this particular bundle on the doorstep of the upper class. To blame the power elite for what is taught in a rural Vermont school or an inner-city classroom somehow seems too easy. If the elite is so dominant, why hasn't it also censored the books and articles that expose its influence in education? Paradoxically, critical theory cannot explain its own popularity. Any upper class worth its saltso dominant and so monolithic that it determines how American history is taught in almost every American classroom-must also have the power to marginalize those social scientists who expose it. But the upper class has hardly kept critical theory out of education. On the contrary, critical theorists dominate scholarship in the field. Their books get prominently published and well reviewed; education professors assign them to thousands of students every year.

The upper class controls publishing, to be sure, but its control does not extend to content, at least not if the books in question make money. PrenticeHall, which published Who

Rules America Now? by William Dornhoff, is owned by Simon and Schuster, which in turn is owned by Paramount, which used to be part of the conglomerate Gulf and Western but is about to become part of something else. Savage Inequalities by Jonathan Kozol was published by Crown, part of Random House, which is in turn part of the Newhouse corporate empire. One of the glories of capitalism is that somewhere there are publishers who will publish almost any book, so long as they stand to make a profit from it. Ifthe upper class forces the omission of "crucial facts and viewpoints," then why has it failed to censor the entire marvelous secondary literature in American history-which WHV IS HISTORY TAUGHT LIKE THIS? -

occasionally even breaks into prime-time public television in series like Eyes an she Prize, an account of the civil rights movement. The upper class seems to be falling down on the job.

The elite has also failed to censor American history museums. After textbooks, museums are probably our society's most important purveyors of American history to the public. Unlike textbooks, however, many history museums have undergone considerable changes in the last two decades. The Naiional Museum of American History, part of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., offers an illustration. Its newer exhibitssuch as Field to factory, about the northward migration of African Americans, A More Perfect Union, portraying Japanese American concentration camps during World War II, and American Encounters, about the clash and mix of Indian, Latino, and Anglo cultures in New Mexicocriticize aspects of our recent national past. In the same period, the Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond, Virginia, mounted its first-ever exhibit on slavery, which included chains, torture devices, and a catalog that did not minimize the inhumanity of the institution.2i If museums reflect the interests of the power structure, are we to infer that the elite mellowed in the 1980s and early 1990s? These were Reagan-Bush years, when the administration criticized the arts and humanities endowments from a conservative and patriotic stance. We must conclude, mixing a metaphor, that the power elite did not have its thumb on every pie.

To be sure, museum boards include members of the upper class. Robert Heilbroner has pointed out that no matter what is done in America, members of the upper class usually have a hand in it; however, their participation does not mean that

they directed the action, nor that it was in their class's interest.25 In the early 1960s, for instance, when elite colleges and universities recruited almost solely in private and suburban public high schools and relied on standardized tests to screen applicants, their student bodies were overwhelmingly white. The power elite theorists could claim that the elite reserved these positions of privilege for their own offspring as part of the structure of unequal opportunity. In the late 1960s, when the same universities competed to recruit and admit African American students, the power elite theorists could claim that the elite was coopting the cream of ghetto society in order to stifle protest and maintain the structure of unequal opportunity. Thus critical or power elite theories seem to explain everything but may explain nothing.

Interestingly, the upper class may not even control what is taught in its "own" history classrooms. "Preppies" who attend the University of Vermont are more likely than public school graduates to have encountered high school history teachers who challenged them and diverged from rote use of textbooks. Such teachers' success in teaching "subversively" in the belly of the upper class should hearten us to believe that it can be done anywhere.

On the other hand, if textbooks are devised t > y the upper class to manipulate youngsters to support the status quo, they hardly seem to be succeeding. Instead of revering Columbus, students wind up detesting history. Evidence suggests that history textbooks and courses make little impact in increasing trust in the United States or inducing good citizenship, however these are measured.25 Voting is the one form of citizenship that the textbooks push, yet voting in America is way down, especially among recent high school graduates. The fact that social studies and history courses give citizenship such a sanctimonious tinge may help explain why fewer than 17 percent of eligible voters aged eighteen to twenty-four voted in 1986.!

In sum, power elite theories may credit the upper class with more power, unity, and conscious self-interest than it has. Indeed, regarding their alleged influence on American history textbooks, they may be scapegoats: blaming the power elite is comforting. Power elite theory offers tidy explanations: educational institutions cannot reform because the upper class prevents it, or the reform is not in that class's interest. Accordingly, power elite theory may create a world more satisfying and more coherent in evil than the real world

with which we are all complicit. Power elite theories thus absolve the rest of us from seeing that all of us participate in the process of cultural distortion. This line of thought not only excuses us from responsibility for the sorry state of American history as currently taught, it also frees us from the responsibility for changing it. What's the use? Any action we might take would be inconsequential by definition.

Upper-class control may not be necessary to explain textbook misrepresentation, however. Special pressures in the world of textbook publishing may account to some extent for the uniformity and dullness of" American history textbooks. Almost half the states have textbook adoption boards. Some of these boards function explicitly as censors, making sure that books not only meet criteria for length, coverage, and reading level, but also that they avoid topics and treatments that might offend some parents. States without such boards are not necessarily freer of censorship, for there screening usually takes place on the local level, where concern about giving offense can be even more immediate. Moreover, states without textbook boards constitute smaller markets, since publishers must win approval at the individual district or school level. Therefore states without boards have less influence on publishers, who orient their best efforts toward the large states wilh adoption boards. California and Texas, in particular, directly affect publishers and textbooks because they are large markets with statewide adoption and active lobbying groups. Schools and districts in nonadoption states must choose among books designed for the larger markets.

Textbook adoption processes are complex.ZB Some states, such as Tennessee, accept almost every book that meets certain basic criteria for binding,

reading level, and subject matter. Tennessee schools then select from among perhaps two dozen books, usually making districtwide decisions. At the other extreme, Alabama adopts just one book per subject. State textbook boards are usually small committees whose members have been appointed by the governor or the state commissioner of education. They are volunteers who may be teachers, lawyers, parents, or other concerned citizens. The daily work of the textbook board is typically performed by a small staff that begins by circulating specifications, which tell publishers the grade levels, physical requirements (size,

binding, and the like), and guidelines as to content for all subjects in which they next plan to adopt textbooks.

Publishers respond by sending books and ancillary materials. Meanwhile the board, with input from the person(s) who appointed them and sometimes with staff input as well, sets up rating committees in each subject areafor instance, high school American history. The staff holds orientation meetings for these rating committees, explains the forms used for ratine the textbooks, and then sends the books to the raters. B Usually one formal meeting is set up foe publishers' representatives to address the rating committees. Large states may hold several meetings in different parts of the state. At these meetings the representatives emphasize the ways in which their books excel. For the most part representatives push form, not content: they tout special features of layout, art work, “skills building,” and ancillary material such as videos and exams.

Rating committees face a Herculean task. Remember that the twelve books I examined average 888 pages. I have spent much of the last ten years struggling to comprehend and evaluate these books. In a single summer raters cannot even read all the books, let alone compare them meaningfully. Raters also wrestle with an average of seventy-three different rating criteria, which they apply to each book they rate, an Augean stable. Therefore publishers' representatives can make a difference. Since raters have time only to flip through most books, they look for easy readability, newness, a stunning color cover, appealing design, color illustrations, ancillary filmstrips, and ready-made teaching aids and test questions, seizing on these attributes as surrogates for quality.29 Unfortunately, marketing textbooks is like marketing fishing lures: the point is to catch fishermen, not fish. Thus many adopted textbooks are flashy to catch the eye of adoption committees but dull when read by students.

What content do adopters want to see? First off, they !ook for their own state. In Vermont, woe to [he textbook that omits Chester A. Arthur, famed twenty-first president of these United States. While he never made it very far into the hearts ofhis countrymen, Arthur had best get into the pages ofits textbooks, because he is one of only two presidents Vermont produced. The Alamo lies deep in the heart of (white) Texans; woe to any textbook that might point out that love of slavery motivated Anglos to fight there for “freedom.” California's legislature recently debated a bill to require textbooks to include the internment ofJapanese Americans during World War II.30 Usually adopters find the details they

seek. Most textbook editors start their careers in publishing as sales representatives. They are not historians, but they know their market. They include whatever is likely to be of concern. Everything gets mentioned. Lynne Cheney, former director of the National Endowment for the Humanities, decried the result; “Textbooks come to seem like glossaries of historical eventscompendiums oftopics.”

In some states the next step is hearings, in which the public is invited to comment on books approved by the rating committees. In Texas and California, at least, these are occasions at which organized groups attack or promote one or more of the selections, often contending that a book fails to meet a requirement found within the regulations or specifications. Although publishers lament the procedure, critics, particularly in Texas, have unearthed and forced publishers to correct hundreds of errors, from misspellings to the claim that “President Truman 'easily settled' the Korean War by dropping the atomic bomb”!" Since adoption committees do try to please constituents, those who complain at hearings often make a difference.

Adoption states used to pressure publishers overtly to espouse certain points of view. For years any textbook sold in Dixie had to call the Civil War “the War between the States.” Earlier editions of The American Pageant used the even more pro-Confederate term “the War for Southern Independence” and did “exceptionally well” in Southern states; only after the civil rights movement did Pageant revert to “the Civil War.” Alabama law used to require that schools avoid “textbooks containing anything partisan, prejudicial, or inimical to the interests of the [white] people of the State” or that would “cast a reflection on their past history.” Texas still requires that “textbooks shall not contain material which serves to undermine authority.”35 Such standards are astounding in their breadth and might force drastic cuts in almost every chapter of every textbook, except that authors have already omitted most unpleasantries and controversies.

Many states have rewritten their textbook specifications to strike such blatant content requirements. Since at least 1970 Mississippi's regulations, for example, have consisted of a series of cliches with which no reasonable textbook author or critic could disagree. Publishers might be forgiven if they believe chat the spirit of the old regulations still survives, however, for the initial rejection of Mississippi: Conflict and Change proves that it does. I was senior author of the book, a

revisionist state history text finally published by Pantheon Books in 1974. I say “finally” because Pantheon brought it out only after eleven other publishers refused. The problem wasn't with the quality of the manuscript, which won the Lillian Smith Award. The problem was that trade publishers said they could not publish a textbook, while textbook publishers said they could not publish a book so unlikely to be adopted. Some publishers even feared that Mississippi might retaliate against their textbooks in other subjects! Textbook publishers proved partly rightthe textbook board refused to allow our book. It contained too much black history, featured a photograph of a lynching, and gave too much attention to the recent past, according to the white majority on the rating committee. My coauthors and I, joined by three school districts that wanted to adopt the book, sued the state in a First Amend ment challenge, Loewtn a al. v. Tumipseed et a!., and in 1980 got the book on the state's approved list.

Another force for uniform, conservative textbooks comes from publishing houses themselves, “There's a great deal of copying,” Carolyn Jackson, who has probably edited more American history textbooks than any other single individual, told me. Every house covets the success of Triumph of the American Nation, which holds a quarter to a third of the American market. Although adequate scholarship exists in the secondary literature to support such ventures intellectually, not a single left-wing or right-wing American history textbook has ever been published. Neither has a major textbook emphasizing African American, Latino, labor, or feminist history as the entry point to general American history.56 Such books might sell dozens of thousands of copies a year and make thousands of dollars in profit. At the least, they would command niches in the marketplace all their own. Publishers might do fine without Texas.31 Nonetheless no publishing house can see such possibilities; all are blinded by the golden prospect of putting out the next Triumph and making millions of dollars. One editor characterized a prospective book, perhaps unfairly, as too focused on “the mistreatment of blacks” in American history, “We couldn't have that as our only American history,“ he continued. ”So we broke the contract.“ The manuscript was never published. ”We didn't want a book with an axe to grind,” the editor concluded. Of course, one person's point of view is another's axe to grind, so textbooks end up without

axes or points of view.

Thus textbook uniformity cannot be attributed exclusively to oven state censors. Even in the formerly communist countries of Eastern Europe, censorship was largely effected by authors, editors, and publishers, riot by state censors, and was “ultimately 3 matter of . . . sensitivity to the ideological atmosphere.”38 It is not too different here: textbook publishers rarely do anything that they imagine might risk state disapproval. Therefore they never stray far from the traditional textbooks in form, tone, and content. Indeed, when Scott, Foresman merely replaced Macbeth with Hamlet in their literature reader, educators and editors considered the change so radical that Hillel Black devoted three pages to the event in his book on textbook publishing, The American Scbootbook}TM In American history, even more than in literature, publishers strive for a “balanced” approach to offend no one.

Publishers would undoubtedly think twice before including a hard-hitting account of Columbus, for example. In Chapter Two I used genocide to refer to the destruction of the Arawaks in the Caribbean. When scholars used the same term in applying for a grant for a television series on Columbus from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the endowment rejected them.40 Lynne Cheney said that the word was a problem. The entire project, “1492: Clash of Visions,” was too pro-Indian for the endowment. “It's OK to talk about (he barbarism of the Indians, but not about the barbarism of the Europeans,” according to the series producer.

For publishers to avoid giving offense is getting increasingly difficult, however. A dizzying array of criticscreationists, the radical right, civil liberties groups, racial minorities, feminists, and even professional historianshave entered the fray No longer do textbooks get denounced only as integrationist or liberal.1" Now they are also attacked as colonialist, Eurocentric, or East-Coastcentric. Publishers must feel 3 bit flustered as they delete a passage modestly critical of American policy to please right-wing critics in one state, only to find they have offended left-wing critics in another. Including a photograph of Henry Cisneros may please Hispanics but risk denunciation by New Englanders demanding a photograph ofJohn Adams.

Although publishers want to think of themselves as moral beings, they also want to make money. “We want to do well

while doing good," the president of Random House, the parent company of Pantheon, said to me as he inquired into the commercial prospects of our Mississippi textbook.43 Thoughts of the bottom line narrow the range of thought publishers tolerate in textbooks. Publishers risk over half a million dollars in production costs with every new text book. Understandably, this scares them.

What about the authors? Since every bad paragraph had to have an author, surely authors lie at the heart of the process. It's not always clear who the real authors are, however. According to Hillel Black, the names on the cover of a textbook are rarely those of the people who really wrote it.44 Lewis Todd and Merle Curti may have written the first draft of Rise ofthe American Nation back in 1949, but by the time its tenth edition came out in 1991, now titled Triumph ofthe American Nation, Curti was ninety-five and Todd was dead. The people listed as authors on some other textbooks have even less to do with them. Some teachers and historians merely rent their names to publishers, supplying occasional advice in return for a fraction of the usual royalties, while minions in the bowels of the publishing houses do the work of organizing and writing the textbooks.

An executive at Prentice-Hall told me that James Davidson and Mark Lytle "have written every word" of The United StaresA History of the Republic, except "the skills" sections and "maybe not the photo captions." She also told me that Daniel Boorstin "controls every word that goes into his book," which is not quite the same thing but does imply substantial author involvement. Prentice-Hall relies on Davidson and Lytle to keep A History ofthe Republic current in historical content, according to the publisher, but Mark Lytle claimed more modestly that he and his coauthor play only "a kind of authentication role" regarding new editions. The publisher initiates the new material and it is "too late to make any major changes once it reaches us." The bulk of the publisher's changes have been aimed toward keeping the book up to date in pedagogical style and changing the last chapter to bring the book closer to the present. Publishers tend to innovate more than authors, so although new editions may have new looks and even new bibliographies, they rarely have much new historical content. Gradually, as books move from first to fifth or eighth editions, the listed authors have less and less to do with them.

In interviews with me, publishing executives blamed

adoption boards, school administrators, or parents, whom they feel they have to please, for the distortions and lies of omission that mar U.S. history textbooks. Parents, whether black militants or Texas conservatives, blame publishers. Teachers blame administrators who make them use distasteful books or the publishers who produced them. But authors blame no one. They claim credit for their books. Several authors told me that they suffered no editorial interference. Indeed, authors of three different textbooks told me that their editors never offered a single content suggestion. “That book doesn't have fifty words in it that were changed by the editor!” exclaimed one author. “They were so respectful of my judgment, they were obsequious,” said another. “I kept waiting for them to say no, but they never did.”

If authors claim to have written the textbooks as they wanted, then maybe they are to blame for their books. Sometimes they don't know any better. I asked John Garraty, author of American History, why he omitted the plague in New England that devastated Zndian societies before the Pilgrims came. “I didn't know about it,” was his straightforward reply,

Sometimes authors do know better. As previously mentioned, in After [be Fact, a book aimed at college history majors, James Davidson and Mark Lytle do 3 splendid job telling of the Indian plagues, demonstrating that they understand their geopolitical significance, their devastating impact on Indian culture and religion, and their effect on estimates of the precontact Indian population. In After the Fact, looking down from the Olympian heights of academe, Davidson and Lytle even write, “Textbooks have finally begun to take note of these largescale epidemics.” Meanwhile, their own high school history textbook leaves them out!

How are we to understand this kind of behavior? Authors know that even if their textbook is good, it won't really count toward tenure and promotion at most universities, where the message is “Sealscholars don't write textbooks.”50 If the textbook is bad, the authors won't get chastised by the profession because professional historians do not read or review high school textbooks. Thus the authors' academic reputations are not really on the line.

Adoption boards loom in the textbook authors' minds to a degree, especially when publishers bring them up. Authors

rarely have personal knowledge of the adoption processI am an unfortunate exception! Editors may invoke students' parents as well as adoption boards in cautioning authors not to give offense. “I wanted a text that could be used in every state,” one author told me. She relied on her publisher for guidance about what would and would not accomplish this aim. Mark L ytle characterized his own textbook as “a McDonald's version of historyif it has any flavor, people won't buy it.” He based this conclusion on his publisher's “survey of what the market wanted.”i On the other hand, publishers know that “students, parents, teachers want to see themselves represented in the texts,” as one editor said to me, and occasionally influence authors to make their books less traditional. Michael Kammen tells of a publisher who tried to persuade the two authors of an American history textbook to give more space to Native Americans. Thomas Bailey's publisher pressed him to include mote women and African Americans in The American Pageant?

Regardless of the direction of the input, publishers are in charge. “They didn't want famous people, because we'd be more tractable,” Mark Lytle told me, explaining why a major publisher had sought out him and James Davidson, relative unknowns. Two widely-published authors told me that publishers tore up textbook contracts with them because they didn't like the political slant of their manuscripts. “We have arguments,” one editor told me bluntly. “We usually win.”

Very different conditions apply to secondary works in history, where the intended readership typically includes professional historians. Authors of booklength secondary works know that publishers and journal editors hire professional historians to evaluate manuscripts, so they write for other historians from the beginning. Writers also know that other historians will review their monographs after publication, and their reputation will be made or broken by those reviews in the historical journals.

With such different readerships, it is natural for secondary works and textbooks to be very different from each other. Textbook authors need not concern themselves unduly with what actually happened in history, since publishers use patriotism, rather than scholarship, to sell their books. This emphasis should hardly be surprising: the requirement to take American history originated as part of a nationalist flag-waving campaign early in this century." Publishers start the pitch on their outside covers, where nationalist titles such as

The Challenge of Freedom and Land of Promise are paired with traditional patriotic icons: eagles, Independence Hall, the Stars and Stripes, and the Statue of Liberty. Publishers market the books as tools for helping students to “discover” our “common beliefs” and “appreciate our heritage.” No publisher tries to sell a textbook with the claim that it is more accurate than its competitors.

Textbook authors also bear their student readers in mind, to a degree. From my own experience I know that imagining what one's readers need is an important part of the process of writing a history textbook. Some textbook authors are high school teachers, but most are college professors who know only a few high school or junior high school students personally. Interviews with textbook authors revealed that their imagining of what students need is a sttange process. Something about the enterprise of writing a high school American history textbook converts historians into patriots. One author told me that she was the single parent of an eleven-year-old girl when she started work on her textbook. She “wanted to wrice a book that Samantha would be proud of.” I empathized with this desire and told of my own single parenting of a daughter about the same age. Further conversation made clear, however, chat this author did not simply mean a book her daughter would respect and enjoy. Rather, she wanted a book that would make her daughter feel good about America, a very different thing,

Other textbook authors have shared similar comments with me. They want to produce good citizens, by which they mean people who take pride in their country. Somehow authors feel they must strap on the burden of transmitting and defending Western civilization. Sometimes there was almost a touch of desperation in their commentssort of an “apres moi, le deluge.” Authors can feel that they get only one shot at these children; if they do not reach them now, America's future might be jeopardized. In turn, this leads to a feeling of selfimportancethat one is on the front line of our society, helping the United States continue to grow strong. Not only textbook authors feel this way: historians and history teachers commonly cite their role in building good citizens to justify what they da In “A Proud Word for History,” Allan Nevins waxes euphoric over “school texts that told of Plymouth Rock, Valley Forge, and the Alamo,” He lauds history's role in making a nation strong. “Developing in the young such traits as character, morals, ethics, and good

citizenship," according lo Richard Gross, former president of the National Council for the Social Studies, "are the reasons for studying history and the social sciences."58 When we were writing our Mississippi history my coauthors and I felt the same way that we mighc improve our state and its citizens by imparting knowledge and changing attitudes in its next generation.

When the authors of American history textbooks have their chance to address che next generation at large, however, even those who in their monographs and private conversations are critical of some aspects of our society, they seem to want only to maintain America rather than change it. One textbook author, Carol Berkin, began her interview with me by saying, "As a historian, I am a feminist socialist."9 My jaw dropped, because her textbook displays no hint of feminism or socialism. Surely a feminist author would write a textbook that would help readers understand why no woman has ever been president or even vice-president of the United States. Surely a socialist author would write a textbook that would enable readers to understand why children of working class families do not become president or vice-president, the mythical Abraham Lincoln to the contrary.

If textbooks are overstuffed, overlong, often wrong, mindless, baring, and all alike, why do teachers use them? In one sense, teachers are responsible for the miseducation in OUT history classrooms. After all, the distortions and omissions exposed in the first ten chapters of this book ate lies our teachers tell us. If enough teachers complained about American history textbooks, wouldn't publishers change them? Teachers also play a substantial role in adopting the textbooks; in most states, textbook rating committees are made up mainly of teachers, from whom publishers have faced no groundswell of opposition. On the contrary, many teachers like the textbooks as they are. According to researchers K, K. Wong and T. Loveless, most teachers believe that history textbooks are good and getting better.

Could it be that they just don't know the truth? Many history teachers don't know much history, a national survey of 257 teachers in 1990 revealed that 13 percent had never taken a college history course, and only 40 percent held a B.A, or M.A. in history or had a major with "some history" in it,62 Furthermore, a study of Indiana teachers revealed that fewer than one in five stay cur rent by reading books or articles in American history, A group of high school history

teachers at a recent conference on Christopher Columbus and the Age of Exploitation gasped aloud to learn that people before Columbus knew the world to be round. These teachers were mortified to realize that for years they had been disseminating false information. Of course, teachers cannot teach that which they do not know.

Most teachers do not like controversy. A study some years ago found that 92 percent of teachers did not initiate discussion of controversial issues, 89 percent didn't discuss controversial issues when students brought them up, and 79 percent didn't believe they should. Among the topics that teachers felt children were interested in discussing but that most teachers believed should not be discussed in the classroom were the Vietnam War, politics, race relations, nuclear war, religion, and family problems such as divorce.

Many teachers are frightened of controversy because they have not experienced it themselves in an academic setting and do not know how to handle it. “Most social studies teachers in U.S. schools are ill prepared by their own schooling to deal with uncertainty,” according to Shirley Engle. “They are in over their heads the minute that pat answers no longer suffice.” Inertia is also built into the systemi many teachers teach as they were taught. Even many college history professors who well know that history is full of controversy and dispute become old-fashioned transmitters of knowledge in their own classrooms.

Since textbooks employ a rhetoric of certainty, it is hard for teachers to introduce either controversy or uncertainty into ihe classroom without deviating from the usual standards of discourse. Teachers rarely say “I don't know” in class and rarely discuss how one might then find the answer. “I don't know” violates a norm. The teacher, like the textbook, is supposed to know Students, for their part, are supposed to learn what teachers and textbook authors already know.

It is hard for teachers to teach open-endedly. They are afraid not to be in control of the answer, afraid of losing their authority over the class. To avoid exposing gaps in their knowledge, teachers allow their students to make “very little use of the school's extensive resources,” according to researcher Linda McNeil, who completed three studies of high school social studies classes between 1975 and 1981.66 Who knows where inquiry might lead or how to manage it? John Goodlad found that less than one percent of

instructional time involved class discussions requiring "reasoning or perhaps an opinion from students."67 Instead of discussion and research, teachers emphasize "simplistic teacher-controlled information." Teachers' "patterns of knowledge control were, according to their own statements in taped interviews, rooted in their desire for classroom control," according to McNeil.68 They end up adopting the same omniscient tone as their textbooks. As a result, teachers present a boring, overly ordered way ofthinking, much less interesting than the way people really think. Summarizing McNeil's research, Albert Shanker, himself an advocate for teachers, notes that the same teachers who are "vital, broad-minded, and immensely knowledgeable in private conversations" nonetheless come across as "narrow, dull, and rigid in the classroom."

David Jenness has pointed out that professional historical organizations for at least a century have repeatedly exhorted teachers not to teach history as fact memorization. "Stir up the minds of the pupils," cried the American Historical Association in 1893; avoid stressing "dates, names, and specific events," historians urged in 1934; leaders of the profession have made similar appeals in almost every decade in between and since.7" Nevertheless teachers continue to present factoids for students to memorize. Like textbook authors, teachers can be lazy. Teaching is stressful. Bad textbooks make life easier. They make lesson plans easy to organize. Moreover, publishers furnish lavish packages that include videos for classroom viewing, teachers' manuals with suggestions on how to introduce each topic, and examinations ready to duplicate and gradable by machine. Textbooks also offer teachers the security of knowing they are covering the waterfront, so their students won't be disadvantaged on statewide or nationwide standardized tests.

For all these reasons, national surveys have confirmed that teachers use textbooks more than 70 percent of the time.71 Moreover, most teachers prefer textbooks that are simitar to the books they are already using, a big reason why the "inquiry textbook" movement never caught on in the late 1970s. "Teachers often prefer the errors they are familiar with to unfamiliar but correct information"another reason why errors get preserved and passed on to new generations.

Laziness is not exactly a fair charge, however. When are teachers supposed to find time to do research so they can develop their own course outlines and readings? They

already work a fifty-five-hour week. Most teachers are far too busy teaching, grading, policing, handing out announcements, advising, comforting, hall monitoring, cafeteria quieting, and then running their own households to go off and research topics they do not even know to question. After hours, they are often required to supervise extracurricular activities, to say nothing of grading papers and planning lessons.75 During the academic year most school districts allow teachers just two to four days of "in-service training." Summers offer time to retool but no money, and we can hardly expect teachers to subsidize the rest of us by going three months with no income to learn American history on their own.

Some of the foregoing pressures affect teachers of my subject. But certain additional constraints affect teachers in American history. Like the authors of history textbooks, history teachers can get themselves into a mind-set wherein they feel defensive about the United States, especially in front of minority students. Like authors, teachers can feel that they are supposed to defend and endorse America. Even African American teachers may feel vaguely threatened by criticism of America, threatened lest they be attacked too. Teachers naturally identify with the material they teach. Since the textbooks are defensively boosterish about America, teachers who use them run the risk of becoming defensively boosterish too. Compare the happier estate of the English teacher, who can hardly teach, say, Langston Hughes's mildly subversive poem "Freedom Train" without becoming mildly subversive. Similarly, it is hard to teach Triumph of the American Nation without becoming mildly boring.

Social studies and history teachers often get less respect from colleagues than faculty in other disciplines. When asked what subject might be dropped, elementary school teachers mentioned social studies more often than any other academic area.74 Some high school principals assign history to coaches, who have to teach something, after all. Assigning American history classes to teachers for whom history lies outside their field of competencewhich is the case for 60 percent of U.S. history teachers, according to a nationwide study. obviously implies the subject is not important or that "anyone can teach it." History teachers also have higher class loads than teachers of any other academic subject.

Students too consider history singularly unimportant. According to recent research on student attitudes toward

social studies, “Most students in the United States, at all grade levels, found social studies to be one of the least interesting, most irrelevant subjects in the school curriculum.”

Many teachers in social studies sense what students think of their subject matter. All too many respond by giving up insidenot trying to be creative, making only minimal demands, simply staying ahead of their students in the book. Students in turn respond “with minimal classroom effort,” and the cycle continues.

Relying on textbooks makes it easier for both parties, teachers and students, to put forth minimal effort. Textbooks' innumerable listsof main ideas, key terms, people to remember, dates, skill activities, matching, fill in the blanks, and review identificationswhich appear to be the bane of students' existence, actually have positive functions. These lists make the course content look rigorous and factual, so teachers and students can imagine they are learning something. They make the teacher appear knowledgeable, whereas freer discussion might expose gaps in his/her information or intelligence. Lastly, these lists of items give students a sense offairness about grading: performance on “objective” exams seeking recall of specific factoids is easy to measure. Thus lists reduce uncertainty by conveying to students exactly what they need to know78 Fragmenting history into unconnected “facts” also guarantees, however, that students will not be able to relate many of these terms to their own lives and will retain almost none ofthem after the six-weeks' grading period.

In some ways the two inquiry textbooks in my sample are better than the ten narrative textbooks. Both inquiry books, The American Adventure and Discovering American History, suggest ways students can use primary materials while examining them for distortions. Thf American Adventure directly challenges ethnocentrism in its teachers' guide, a topic never mentioned in any of the other textbooks or their supplementary teaching guides. Research suggests that the inquiry approach leads to higher student interest in contemporary politics.80 However, inquiry textbooks require much more active teaching. Classes can't just plow through them. Teachers must supplement them with additional information, leave out parts ofthe book, choose which exercises to assign, and work in concert with their school librarians. Perhaps it is because inquiry textbooks WHV IS

do not rely on cote learning that teachers and school administrators soon abandoned them. The inquiry approach was too much work.

If teachers seem locked into the traditional narrative textbooks, why don'i teachers teach against them, at least occasionally? Teaching against the book is hard. We have already noted the logistical problems of time and workload. Resources are also a problem, Where do teachers find a point of leverage? If a state historical museum or university is nearby, that can help. But how do teachers know when they do not know something? How do they know when their book is wrong or misleading? Moreover, students have been trained to believe what they read in print. How can teachers compete with the expertise of established authors backed by powerful publishers?

Teaching against a textbook can also be scary. Textbooks offer security. Teachers can hide behind them when principals, parents, or students challenge them to defend their work. Teaching against the textbook might be construed as critical of the school system, supervisor, principal, or department head who selected it. Teachers could get in trouble for doing that.

A student of mine who was practice-leaching in an elementary school decided to introduce her students to what she had learned from my course about the Pilgrims, the plagues, and Thanksgiving, The professor of education who supervised her field placement vetoed her plan. “Telling the kids this information, going against their traditions, is like telling them there's no Santa Glaus.” He was also concerned that the information might “cause a big controversy with the families.” With the approval of the classroom teacher, my student persevered, however. While she received no parental complaints, it is true that she risked being perceived as hostile or negative by some parents, administrators, and even fellow teachers.

Teachers do get fired, after all. I have interviewed several high school teachers and librarians who have been fired or threatened with dismissal for minor acts of independence such as making material available that some parents consider controversial. Teachers have been fired for teaching Brave New World in Baltimore, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest in Idaho, and almost everything else in between. Knowing this, many teachers anticipate that powerful forces will pounce

upon them and doubt that anyone will come to their defense, so they relax into what Kenneth Carlson called the "security of selfcensorship."84 I am convinced, though, that most teachers enjoy substantial freedom in practice. "Most teachers have little control over school policy or curriculum," wrote Tracy Kidder in Among Schoolchildren, "but most have a great deal of autonomy inside their classrooms." In Who Controls Our Schools?,

Michael W. Kirst agreed: "Teachers have in effect a pocket veto on what is taught. An old tradition in American public schools is that once the door ofthe classroom shuts nobody checks on what a teacher actually does."95 Nonetheless even teachers who have little real cause to fear for their jobs typically avoid unnecessary risks.

Perhaps I have been too pessimistic here about teachers. Everywhere I have traveled to speak about the problems with textbooks, I have encountered teachers hungry for accurate historical information. I have met many imaginative teachers who make American history come alivewho bring in controversies and primary source material and challenge students to think. Despite these heroic exceptions in schools all over America, however, the majority of social studies teachers are part of the problem, not part of the solution.

Let us cast our net even wider. Are all of us involved? The myths in our history are not limited to our schooling, after all. These cultural lies have been woven into the fabric of our entire society. From the flat-earth advertisements on Columbus Day weekend to the racist distortion of Reconstruction in Gone with the Wind, our society lies to itself about its past. Questioning these lies can seem anti-American. Textbooks may only reflect these lies because we want them to. Textbooks may also avoid controversy because we want them to: at least half of the respondents in national public opinion polls routinely agree that "books that contain dangerous ideas should be banned from public school libraries."86 And when the National Assessment for Educational Progress sent its social studies assessment instruments to lay reviewers "to help insure that [they] would be acceptable to the general public," the public replied, "references to specific minority groups should be eliminated whenever possible," "extreme care" should be used in wording any references to the FBI, the president, labor unions, and some other organizations, and "exercises which show national heroes in an uncomplimentary fashion

though factually accurate are offensive."

]ohn Williamson, the president of a major textbook publishing company, employed this line to defend publishers: "In the 30s, the treatment of females and of black people clearly mirrored the attitudes of society. All females were portrayed in homemaker roles . . . Blacks were not portrayed at all." Williamson went on to admit that recent improvements in the treatment of women and blacks have not been due to publishers, "much as we would like the credit." As in the past, "textbooks mirror our society and contain what that society considers acceptable." Williamson concluded that all this was as it should beparents, teachers, and members of the community should have the right to pressure publishers to present history as they want it presented.

Williamson has a point. However, when publishers hide behind "society," their argument invokes a chicken-and-egg problematic, for if textbooks varied more, pressure groups in society would have more alternatives for which to lobby. Moreover, Williamson has conceded the major point: that history textbooks stand in a very different relationship to the discipline of history than most textbooks do to their respective fields. "Society" determines what goes into history textbooks. By contrast, the mathematics profession determines what goes into math textbooks and, creationist pressure notwithstanding, the biology profession determines what goes into biology textbooks. To be sure, mathematics and biology textbooks are products of the same complex organizations and delicate adoption procedures as American history textbooks. To be sure, math and biology books also err. But only about history and social studies do writers actually ask, "Can textbooks have scholarly integrity?"811 Only in history is accuracy so political.

Consider the example of black soldiers in the Civil War. Even in the 1930s the facts about their contribution were plain for all to see in the primary sources and even the textbooks of the Civil War and Reconstruction eras. Depression-era textbooks omitted those facts, not because they were unknown but because including important acts by African Americans did not "mirror the attitudes of [white) society." Thus to understand how textbooks in the 1930s presented the Civil War, we do not look at the history of the 1860s but at the society of the 1930s. Similarly, to understand how textbooks today present the Civil War, the

Pilgrims, or Columbus, we do not look at the 1860s, 1620s, or 1490s, but at the 1990s. What distortions of history does our society cause? We must not fool ourselves that the process of distorting history has magically stopped. We must not congratulate ourselves that our society now treats everyone fairly and manifests attitudes that allow accurate interpretations of the past. We must not pretend that, unlike all previous generations, we write true history. When parents and teachers do not demand from publishers and schools the same effort to present accurate history that we expect in other disciplines,

we become part of the problem. Because history is more personal than geology or even American literature, more about "us," there is an additional reason not to present it honestly; don't we want our children to be optimists? Some people feei that we should sanitize history to protect students from unpleasamries, at least until they are eighteen or so. Children have to grow up soon enough as it is, these people say; let them enjoy childhood. Why confront our young people with issues even adults cannot resolve? Must we tell all the grisly details about what Columbus did on Haiti, for example, to fifth-graders?90 Sissela Bok wrote a whole book about, and mostly against, lying; but she seems to agree that lying to children is OK, and compares it to sheltering them from harsh weather.

Certainly age-graded censorship is the one form of censorship that almost everyone believes is appropriate: fifth-graders should not see violent pornography, for instance. Some fifthor even twelfth-graders who encounter illustrations of Spaniards cutting off Indians' hands or Indians committing suicide might have nightmares about Columbus. Withholding pornography is not a precise analogy to whitewashing history, however. When we fail to present students with the truth about, say, Columbus, we end up presenting a lie insteadat least a lie of serious omission, I doubt that shielding children from horror and violence is really the cause of textbook omissions and distortions. Books do include violence, after all, so long as it isn't by "us." For instance, American History describes John Brown's actions at Pottawatomie, Kansas, in 1856:

When Brown learned of the [Lawrence] attack, he led a party of seven men. . . . In the dead of night they entered the cabins of three unsuspecting families. For no apparent reason they murdered five people. They split open their skulls with

heavy, razor-sharp swords. They even cut off the hand of one of their victims.

Telling of skulls split open and providing minutiae like the heft and sharpness of the swords prompt us to feel revulsion toward Brown. Certainly the author does not provide these details to shield students from unpleasantries.

If textbooks are going to include severed hands, those of the Arawaks cut off by Columbus are much more historically significant. Columbus's severings were systematic and helped depopulate Haiti. American History, having omitted these atrocities, cannot claim to present Pottawatomie evenhandedly.

Violence aside, what about shielding children from other untoward realities of our society? How should social studies classes teach young people about the police, for instance? Should the approach be Officer Friendly? Or should children receive a Marxist interpretation of how the power structure uses the police as its first line of control in urban ghettoes? Does the approach we choose depend on whether we teach in the suburbs or the inner city? If a more complex analysis of the police is more useful than Officer Friendly for inner-city children, does that mean we should teach about slavery differently in the suburbs from the inner city?

In 1992 Los Angeles exploded in a violent race riot, triggered by a white suburban jury's acquittal of four police officers who had been videotaped beating a black traffic offender, Rodney King. Almost every child in America saw this most famous of all home videotapes. Therefore almost every child in America learned that Officer Friendly is not the whole story. We do not protect children from controversy by offering only an Officer Friendly analysis in school. All we do is make school irrelevant to the major issues of the day. Rock songs bought by thirteen-year-olds treat AIDS, nuclear war, and ecocide. Rap songs discuss racism, sexism, drug use- and American history. We can be sure chat our children already know about and think about these and other issues, whether we like it or not. Indeed, attempts by parents to preserve some nonexistent childhood innocence through avoidance are likely to heighten rather than reduce anxiety.U2 Lying and omission are not the right ways. There is 3 way to teach truth to a child at any age level.

Maybe textbooks that emphasize how wonderful, fair, and progressive our society has been give some students a basis for idealism. It may be empowering for children to believe

that simply by living we all contribute to a constantly improving society. Maybe later, when students grow up and learn better, they will be motivated to change the system to make it resemble the ideal. Maybe stressing fairness as a basic American value provides a fulcrum from which students can criticize society when they discover, perhaps in college history courses, how it has often been unfair. This all may be an instance of Emily Dickinson's couplet “The Truth must dazzle gradually/ Or every man be blind.”

Since fewer than one American in six ever takes an American history course after leaving high school, it is not clear just when the next generation will get dazzled by the troth in American history. Another problem with this line of thinking is that the truth may then dazzle students with the sudden realization that their teachers have been lying to them. A student of mine wrote of having been “taught the story of George Washington receiving a hatchet for his birthday and proceeding to chop down his father's favorite cherry tree.” To her horror this student later discovered that “a story I had held sacred in my memory for so long had been a lie.” She ended up “feeling bitter and betrayed by my earlier teachers who had to lie to build up George Washington's image, causing me to question all that I had previously learned.” This student's alienation pales besides that of African Americans when they confront another truth about the Founding Fathers: “When I first learned that Washington and Jef ferson had slaves, I was devastated,” the historian Mark Lloyd told me. “I didn't want to have anything more to do with them.'”14 Selling Washington as a hero to Native Americans will eventually founder on a similar rock when they learn what he did to the Iroquois.

It is hard to believe that adults keep children ignorant in order to preserve their idealism. More likely, adults keep children ignorant so they won't be idealistic. Many adults fear children and worry that respect for authority is all that keeps them from running amok. So they teach them to respect authorities whom adults themselves do not respect. In the late 1970s survey researchers gave parents a series of statements and asked whether they believed them and wanted their children to believe them. One statement stood out: “People in authority know best.” Parents replied in these proportions:

13%“believe and want children to believe” 56%“have doubts but still want to teach to children” 30%“don't believe

and don't want to pass on to children”

Thus a majority of parents wanted their children not to doubt authority figures, even though the parents themselves doubted.

Some adults simply do not trust children to think. For several decades sociologists have documented Americans' distrust of the next generation. Parents may feel undermined when children get tools of information and inquiry not available to adults and use them in ways that seem to threaten adult-held values. Many parents want children to concentrate on the 3 R's, not on multicultural history. Shirley Engle has described “a strident minority [of teachers and parents] who do not really believe in democracy and do not really believe that kids should be taught to think.”7 Perhaps adults' biggest reason for lying is that they fear our historyfear that it isn't so wonderful, and that if children were to learn what has really gone on, they would lose all respect for our society. Thus when Edward Ruzzo tried in 1964 to cover up Warren G. Harding's embarrassing love letters to a married woman, he used the rationale “that anything damaging to the image of an American President should be suppressed to protect the younger generation.” As fudge Ruzzo put it, there are too many juvenile delinquents as it is.

Ironically, only people who themselves have been raised on shallow feelgood history could harbor such doubts. Harding may not have been much ofa role model, but other AmericansTom Paine, Thoreau, Lincoln, Helen Hunt Jackson, Martin Luther King, and yes, John Brown, Helen Keller, and Woodrow Wilson too-are still celebrated by lovers of freedom everywhere. Yet publishers, authors, teachers, and parents seem afraid 10 expose children to the blazing idealism of these leaders at their best. Today many aspects of American life, from the premises of our legal system to elements of our popular culture, inspire other societies. If Russia can abandon boosterish history, as it seems to have done, surely America can toaTO “We do not need a bodyguard of lies,” points out Paul Gagnon. “We can afford to present ourselves in the totality of our acts.”lc Textbook authors seem not to share Gagnon's confidence, however. There is a certain contradiction in the logic of those who write patriotic textbooks. On the one hand, they describe a country without repression, without real conflict. On the other hand, they obviously believe that we need Co lie to students to instill in

them love of country. But if the country is so wonderful, why must we lie?

Ironically, our lying only diminishes us. Bernice Reagon of the Smithsonian Institution has pointed out that other countries are impressed when we send spokespeople abroad who, like herself, are willing to criticize the United States. Surely this is part of what democracy is about. Surely in a democracy a historian's dury is to tell the truth. Surely in a democracy students need to develop informed reasons to criticize as well as take pride in their country. Maybe somewhere along the line we gave up on democracy?

Lying to children is a slippery slope. Once we have started sliding down it, how and when do we stop? Who decides when to lie? Which lies to tell? To what age group? As soon as we loosen the anchor of fact, of historical evidence, our history textboat is free to blow here and there, pointing first in one direction, then in another. If we obscure or omit facts because they make Columbus look bad, why not omit those that make the United States look bad? or the Mormon Church? or the state of Mississippi? This is the politicization of history. How do we decide what to teach in an American history course once authors have decided not to value the truth? If our history courses aren't based on fact anyway, why not tell one story to whites, another to blacks? Isn't Scott, Foresman already doing something like that when it puts out a “Lone Star” edition of Land of Promise, tailoring the facts of history to suit (white) Texans?

These are rhetorical questions, I suppose. Because they commonly repeat treatments from earlier textbooks for the most part, authors rarely answer them consciously. In any event, postmodernists caution us not to “privilege” one account over others with the label “true.” Philosopher Martin Heidegger once defined truth as “that which makes a people certain, clear, and strong,” and American history textbooks apparently intend to do just that, at least for conventional European Americans. Before we abandon the old “correspondence to fact” sense of truth in favor of Heidegger's more useful definition, however, we may want to recall that he gave it in the service of Adolf Hitler. Moreover, if the textbooks aren't true, they leave us with no grounds for defending the courses based on them, when students charge that American history is a waste of time. Why should children believe what they learn in American history, if their textbooks are full of distortions and lies? Why should they

bother to learn it?

Luckily, as the next chapter tells, they don't.

William Jennings Bryan: “I do not think about the things that I do not think about.” Clarence Darrow: 'Do you ever think about the things that you do think about?' Inherit the Wind Learning social studies is, to no small extent, whether in elementary school or the university, learning to be stupid.

Yeah, I cut class, I got a D 'Cause history meant nothin' to me.

The truth shall make us free. The truth shall make us free. The truth shall make us free some day. Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe, The truth shall make us free some day.

Jules Henry Jungle Brothers Verse of "We Snail Overcome'

Lies My Teacher Told Me

12. What Is the Result of Teaching History Like This?

All over America, high school students sit in social studies and American history classes, look at their textbooks, write answers to the questions at the end of each chapter, and take quizzes and examinations that test factual recall. When I was subjected to this regimen, I never answered any of the terms at the end of the chapter until the sixth week of each six-week grading period. Then the teacher and I would negotiate what proportion of the terms I had to define correctly to get an A“ {usually something like 85 percent) and I would madly write out definitions through the last two days ofclass. Three years later, when my sister took American history, student culture had developed a more effective technique. Students did the work on time, writing real definitions to the first two and last two terms, but for the thirty or forty in the middle they free-associated whatever nonsense they wanted. ”Hawley-Smoot Tariff I have no idea, Mr. De Moulin,“ might be one entry. Or ”Blue Eagle: FDR's pet bird who got very sad when he died,“ Educational theorists call such acts ”day-today resistance"a phrase that comes from theorizing about slaverybut I did not know that then. I was just envious that my class hadn't thought of such a marvelous labor-saving ploy.

Of course, fooling the teacher is of little consequence. Quite possibly my sister's teacher even knew of the ruse and joked about it with his colleagues, the way masters chuckled that their slaves were so stupid they had to be told every evening to bring in the hoes or they would leave them out in the night dew. Some social studies and history teachers try to win student cooperation by telling them, when introducing a topic, not to worry, they won't have to learn much about it. Students happily acquiesce.4 Students also invest a great deal of creative energy in getting teachers to waste time and relax requirements.5 Teachers acquiesce partly because, as with much day-to-day resistance during slavery, yielding does not really threaten the system. Day-to-day school resistance also provides students a form of psychic distance, a sense that

although the system may have commanded their pens, it has not won real cooperation from their minds.

Indeed, it hasn't. Study after study shows that students successfully resist learning American history.6 A few years ago I observed a class of students being tested on George F. Baer, the Hepburn Act, the Newlands Reclamation Act, the Northern Securities Case, and the Elkins Actand this merely got them part of the way through Teddy Roosevelt's first term! All they could hope to do was cram these items into short-term memory for the test, then forget them to make room for the next list. In the process, they failed to gain any insights or to distinguish airy facts as important enough to merit recall after the end of the grading period.

When two-thirds of American seventeen-year-olds cannot place the Civil War in the right half-century, or 22 percent of my students reply that the Vietnam War was fought between North and South Korea, we must salute young people for more than mere ignorance.7 This is resistance raised to a high level. Students are simply not learning even the details of American history that textbooks and teachers stress. Still less are they learning to apply lessons from the past to current issues. Students are left with no resources to understand, accept, or rebut historical referents used in arguments by candidates for office, sociology professors, or newspaper journalists. If knowledge is power, ignorance cannot be bliss.

Emotion is the glue that causes history to stick. We old-timers remember where we were when we heard of the death of John F. Kennedy because it affected us emotionally. American history is a heartrending subject. When students read real voices from our past, the emotions do not fail to move them. Recall Las Casas's passionate denunciations of the Spanish treatment of Indians: “What we committed in the Indies stands out among the most unpardonable offenses ever committed against God and mankind,” Consider the famous final words of William Jennings Bryan to the 1896 Democratic national convention: “You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns. You shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold.” Or Helen Keller's attack on the Brooklyn Eagle: “Socially blind and deaf, it defends an intolerable system,” Or Franklin D. Roosevelt's words in the depression, assuring us we had “nothing to fear but fear itself.” Events and images also call forth strong feelings. The saga of Elizabeth Blackwell in medical school,

the liberation of Nazi death camp inmates by American (and Russian and British) soldiers, the ultimate success of Jonas Salk in finding a vaccine that would kill poliothese are stirring stories. As textbook critic Mrs, W, K. Haralson writes, “There is no way the glowing, throbbing events of history can be presented fairly, accurately, and factually without involving emotion.”

Earlier ch and courses are many teacherss might be worth seeps into these contrary, most fitional landscape studying it is g< teacher told me, boring.

Another \ students' lives,

teacher in Iowa class of third-gr these students n from U.S. histor the school year, from seeking to connects school "Children, meaningless dat: forget most of t students forget i African America or Asian Araeri because the wa' color and childi white males ine' of mine, who wi crablc Indian pc when he broug brought forth tl that day and no seems reasonab! school year, in 3 Unlike the Abet offense and do self-image to sw Earlier chapters have shown, however, that American history textbooks and courses are neither dispassionate nor passionate. All textbook authors and many teachers seem not to have thought deeply about just what in our past might be worthy of passion, or even serious contemplation. No real emotion seeps into these books, not even real pride.9 Instead, heroic exceptions to the contrary, most American history courses and textbooks operate in a gray emotional landscape of pious duty in which the United States has a good history, so studying it is good for students. “They don't think of history as drama,” one teacher told me. “They all tell me they hate history, because it's dead facts, and boring.”

Another way to cause history to stick is to present it so that it touches students' lives. To show students how racism affects African Americans, a teacher in Iowa discriminated by eye color among members of her all-white class of third-graders for two days. The film A Class Divided shows how vividly these students remembered the lesson fifteen years later.10 In contrast, material from US. history textbooks is rarely retained for fifteen weeks after the end of the school year. By stressing the distant past, textbooks discourage students from seeking to learn history from their families or community, which again dis connects school from the other parts ofstudents' lives.

“Children, [ike most adults, do not readily retain isolated,

incoherent, and meaningless data.”“ Since textbooks provide almost no causal skeleton, students forget most of the mass of detail they ”learn“ in their history courses. Not all students forget it equally, however. Caste minority children-Native Americans, African Americans, and Hispanicsdo worse in all subjects, compared to white or Asian American children, but the gap is largest in social studies. That is because the way American history is taught particularly alienates students of color and children from impoverished families. Feel-good history for affluent white males inevitably amounts to feel-bad history for everyone else. A student of mine, who was practice-teaching in Swanton, Vermont, a town with a considerable Indian population, noticed an Abenaki fifth-grader obviously timing out when he brought up the subject of Thanksgiving. Talking with the child brought forth the following reaction: ”My father told me the real truth about that day and not to listen to any white man scum like you!" Yet Thanksgiving seems reasonably benign compared to, say, Columbus Day Throughout the school year, in a thousand little ways, American history offends many students. Unlike the Abenaki youngster, most have-not students do not consciously take offense and do not rebel but are nonetheless subtly put off. It hurts children's self-image to swallow what their history books teach about the exceptional fairness of America. Black students consider American history, as usually taught, “white” and assimilative, so they resist learning it. This explains why research shows a bigger performance differential between poor and rich students, or black and white students, in history than in other school subjects.12 Girls also dislike social studies and history even more than boys, probably because women and women's concerns and perceptions still go underrepresented in history classes.

Afrocentric history arose partly in response to this problem. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., denounces Afrocentrism as “psychotherapy” for blacksa onesided misguided attempt to make African Americans feel good about themselves.14 Unfortunately, the Eurocentric history in our textbooks amounts to psychotherapy for whites. Since historians like Schlesinger have not addressed Eurocentrism, they do not come into the discussion with clean hands. To be sure, the answer to Eurocentric textbooks is not one-sided Afrocentric history, the kind that has Africans inventing everything good and whites inventing slavery and oppression. Surely we do

not really want a generation of African Americans raised on antiwhite Afrocentric history, but just as surely, we cannot afford another generation of white Americans raised on complacent celebratory Eurocentric history. Even if they don't learn much history from their textbooks, students are affected by the book's slant. Martha Toppin found unanimous agreement with this proposition among ninety high school students: “If Africa had had a history worth learning about, we would have had it last year in Western Civilization.” The message that Eurocentric history sends to nonEuropean Americans is; your ancestors have not done much of importance. It is easy for European Americans and non-European Americans to take a step further and conclude that non-European Americans are not important today.

From the beginning, when textbooks call Columbus's 1492 voyage “a miracle” and proclaim, “Soon the grateful captain wades ashore and gives thanks to God,” they make the Christian deity God and put Him [sit] on the white side. Omitting the Arawaks' perspective on Haiti continues the process of “otherizing” nonwhites in this first diorama from our history. If the “we” in a textbook included American Indians, African Americans, Latinos, women, and all social classes, the book would read differently, just as whites talk differently (and more humanely) in the presence of people of color. Surely it is possible to write accurate multicultural history that spreads the discomfort around, rather than distorting history to help only affluent white children feel comfortable about their past. Maybe we can even write and teach an American history that children of the nonelite would want to study.

Equally as worrisome is the impact of American history courses on white affluent children. This grave result can best be shown by what I call the “Vietnam exercise.” Throughout the Vietnam War, pollsters were constantly asking the American people whether they wanted to bring our troops home. At first, only a small fraction of Americans favored withdrawal. Toward the end of the war, a large majority wanted us to pull out.

Not only did Gallup, Roper, the National Opinion Research Center, and other organizations ask Americans about the war, they also usually inquired about background variablessex, education, region, and the likeso they could find out which kinds of people were most hawkish (prowar), which most dovish. Over ten years I have asked more than a

thousand undergraduates and several hundred nonstudents their beliefs about what kind of adults, by educational level, supported the war in Vietnam. I ask audiences to fill out Table 1, trying to replicate the results ofthe January 1971 national Gallup survey on the war. By January 1971, as I tell audiences, the national mood was overwhelmingly dove: 73 percent favored withdrawal. (I excluded “don't knows.”}

Table 1

In January 1971 the Gallup Poll asked: “A proposal nas been made in Congress to require the U. S. government to bring home all U. S. troops before the end of this year. Would you like to nave your congressman vote for or against this proposal?”

Estimate the results, by education, By filling out this table: Adults with:

College Education High School Education 100%

Grade School Total Education Adults 100% 100%

73%

27%

% for withdrawal of U.S. troops (Doves)

% against withdrawal Of U.S. troops (Hawks)

Totals 100%

Most recent high school graduates are not able even to construct a simple table or interpret a graph. Accordingly, I teach audiences how the table must balancehow, it grade-school-educated adults, for instance, were more dovish than others, hence supported withdrawal by more than 73 percent, some other group must be less dovish than 73 percent for the entire population to balance out at 73 percent doves. If you wish to be an active reader, you might fill out the table yourself before reading further.

By an overwhelming margin-almost 10 to Iaudiences believe that college-educated persons were more dovish. Table 2 shows a typical response.

Table 2

Adults with:

College High School Education Education Grade School EOu cation 100%

Total Adults 100%

90%

75%

60%

73%

10%

25%
40%
27%
% for withdrawal of U.S. troops (Doves)
% against withdrawal Of U.S. troops (Hawks)
T otals 100% 100%

I then ask audiences to assume that their tables are correct-that the results of the survey correspond to what they guessedand to state at least two reasonable hypotheses to explain these results. Their most common responses:

Educated people are more informed and critical, hence more able to sift through misinformation and conclude that the Vietnam War was not in our best interests, politically or morally.

Educated people are more tolerant. There were elements of racism and ethnocentrism in our conduct of the wareducated people are less likely to accept such prejudice.

Less-educated people, being of lower occupational status, were more liKely to be employed in a war-related industry or in the armed forces themselves, hence had self-interest in being prowar.

There is nothing surprising here. Most people feel that schooling is a good thing and enables us to sift facts, weigh evidence, and think rationally. An educated people has been said to be a bulwark of democracy.

However, the truth is quite different. Educated people disproportionately supported the Vietnam War. Table 3 shows the actual outcome of the January 1971 poll:

Table 3

Adults with:

College High School Education Education Grade School Education 100%

Total Adults 100%
60%
75%
80%
73%
40%
25%
20%
27%
% for withdrawal of U.S. troops (Doves]
% against withdrawal Of U.S. troops (Hawks)
Totals 100% 100%

These results surprise even some professional social scientists. Twice as high a proportion of college-educated adults, 40 percent, were hawks, compared to only 20 percent of adults with grade school educations. And this poll was no isolated phenomenon. Similar results were registered again and again, in surveys by Harris, NORC, and others. Way back in 1965, when only 24 percent of the nation agreed that the United States “made a mistake” in sending troops to Vietnam, 28 percent of the grade school-educated felt so. Later, when less than half of the college-educated adults favored pullout, among the grade school educated 61 percent did. Throughout our long involvement in Southeast Asia, on issues related to Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, or Laos, the grade schooleducated were always the most dovish, the college-educated the most hawkish.

Today mosj Americans agree that the Vietnam War was a mistake, politically and morally; so do most political analysts, including such men as Robert McNamara and Clark Clifford, who waaed the war.16 If we concur with this o now conventional wisdom, then we must concede that the more educated a person was, the more likely s/he was to be wrong about the war.

Why did educated Americans support the war? When my audiences learn that educated people were more hawkish, they scurry about concocting new explanations. Since they are still locked into their presumption that educated people are more intelligent and have more good will than the less educated, their theories have to strain to explain why less-educated Americans were right. The most popular revamped theory asserts that since working-class young men bore the real cost of the war, “naturally” they and their families opposed it. This explanation seems reasonable, for it does credit the working class with opposing the war and with a certain brute rationality. But it reduces the thinking of the working class to a crude personal cost-benefit analysis, implicitly denying that the less educated might take society as a whole into consideration. Thus this hypothesis diminishes the position of the working classwhich was more correct than that of the educated, after allto a mere reflex based on self-interest. It is also wrong. Human nature doesn't work that way. Research has shown that people of whatever educational level who expect to go to war tend to support that war, because people rarely don't believe in something they plan to do. Working-class young men who enlisted or

looked forward to being drafted could not easily influence their destinies to avoid Vietnam, but they could change their attitudes about the war to be more positive. Thus, cognitive dissonance helps explain why young men of draft age supported the war more than older men, and why men supported the war more than women. While less-educated families with sons in the Vietnam conflict often formed pockets of support for the war, such pockets were exceptions to the dovishness that pervaded the less-educated segments of our populace.

By now my audiences are keen to learn why educated Americans were more hawkish. Two social processes, each tied to schooling, can account for educated Americans' support of the Vietnam War. The first can be summarized by the term allegiance. Educated adults tend to be successful and earn high incomespartly because schooling leads to better jobs and higher incomes, but mainly because high parental incomes lead to more education for their offspring. Also, parents transmit affluence and education directly to their children. Successful Americans do not usually lay their success at their parents' doorstep, however. They usually explain their accomplishments as owing to their own individual characteristics, so they see American society as meritocratic. They achieved their own success; other people must be getting their just desserts. Believing that American ociery is open to individual input, the educated wellto-do tend to agree with society's decisions and feel they had a hand in forming them. They identify more with our society and its policies. We can use the term vested interest here, so long as we realize we are referring to an ideological interest or need, a need to come to terms with the privilege with which one has been blessed, not simple economic self-interest. In this sense, educated successful people have a vested interest in believing that the society that helped them be educated and successful is fair. As a result, those in the upper third of our educational and income structure are more likely to show allegiance to society, while those in the lower third are more likely to be critical of it.

The other process causing educated adults to be more likely to support the Vietnam War can be summarized under the rubric socialization. Sociologists have long agreed that schools are important socializing agents in our society. “Socializing” in this context does not mean hobnobbing around a punch bowl but refers to the process of learning and

internalizing the basic social rules language, norms, etiquettenecessary for an individual to function in society. Socialization is not primarily cognitive. We are not persuaded rationally not to pee in the living room, we arc required not to. We then internalize and obey this rule even when no authority figure lurks to enforce it. Teachers may try to convince themselves that education's main function is to promote inquiry, not iconography but in fact the socialization function of schooling remains dominant at least through high school and hardly disappears in college. Education as socialization tells people what to think and how to act and requires them to conform. Education as socialization influences students simply to accept the tightness of our society. American history textbooks overtly tell us to be proud of America. The more schooling, the more socialization, and the more likely the individual will conclude that America is good.

Both the allegiance and socialization processes cause the educated to believe that what America does is right. Public opinion polls show the nonthinking results. In late spring 1966, just before we began bombing Hanoi and Haiphong in North Vietnam, Americans split 50/50 as to whether we should bomb these targets. After the bombing began, 85 percent favored the bombing while only 15 percent opposed. The sudden shift was the result, not the cause, of the government's decision to bomb. The same allegiance and socialization processes operated again when policy changed in the opposite direction. In 1968 war sentiment was waning; but 51 percent of Americans opposed a bombing halt, partly because the United States was still bombing North Vietnam. A month later, after President Johnson announced a bombing halt, 71 percent favored the halt. Thus 23 percent of our citizens changed their minds within a month, mirroring the shift in government policy. This swaying of thought by policy affects attitudes on issues ranging from our space program to environmental policy and shows the so-called “silent majority” to be an unthinking majority as well. Educated people are overrepresented among these straws in the wind.

We like to think of education as a mix of thoughtful learning processes. Allegiance and socialization, however, are intrinsic to the role of schooling in our society or any hierarchical society. Socialist leaders such as Fidel Castro and Mao Tse-tung vastly extended schooling in Cuba and China in part because they knew that an educated people is a

socialized populace and a bulwark of allegiance. Education works the same way here: it encourages students not to think about society but merely to trust that it is good. To the degree that American history in particular is celebratory, it offers no way to understand any problemsuch as the Vietnam War, poverty, inequality, international haves and have-nots, environmental degradation, or changing sex rolesthat has historical roots. Therefore we might expect that the more traditional schooling in history that Americans have, the less they will understand Vietnam or any other historically based problem. This is why educated people were more hawkish on the Vietnam War.

Table 2 supplies an additional example of nonthinking by the educated and affluent: they are wrong about who supported the war. By a nine to one margin, the hundreds of educated people who have filled out Table 1 believed that educated Americans were more dovish. Thus the Vietnam exercise suggests two errors by the elite. The first error that educated people made was being excessively hawkish back in 1966, 1968, or 1971. The second error they made was in filling out Table 1.

Why have my audiences been so wrong in remembering or deducing who opposed the Vietnam War? One reason is that Americans like to believe that schooling is a good thing. Most Americans tend automatically to equate educated with informed or tolerant.TM Traditional purveyors of social studies and American history seize upon precisely this belief to rationalize their enterprise, claiming that history courses lead to a more enlightened citizenry. The Vietnam exercise suggests the opposite is more likely true.

Audiences would not have been so easily fooled if they had only recalled that educated people were and are more likely to be Republicans, while high school dropouts are more likely to be Democrats. Hawkish right-wing Republicans, including rhe core supporters of Barry Goldwater in 1964, of Ronald Reagan in 1980, and of groups like the John Birch Society, come disproportionately from the most educated and affluent segments of our society, particularly dentists and physicians. So we should not be surprised that education correlates with hawkishness. At the other end of the social status spectrum, although most African Americans, like most whites, initially supported U.S. intervention in Vietnam, blacks were always more questioning and more dovish than whites, and African

American leadersMuhammad Ali, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm Xwere prominent among the early opponents of the the war.

American history textbooks help perpetrate the archetype of the blindly patriotic hardhat by omitting or understating progressive elements in the working class. Textbooks do not reveal that CIO unions and some working-class fraternal associations were open to all when many chambers of commerce and country clubs were still white-only. Few textbooks tell of organized labor's role in the civil rights movement, including the 1963 March on Washington. Nevertheless many members of my audiences are aware that educated Americans are likely to be Republicans, hard-liners on defense, and right-wing extremists. Some members of my audiences know about Goldwater voters, Muhammad Ali's induction refusal, Birchers and education, or labor unions and the war information that would have helped them fill in the blanks in Table 1 correctly. Somehow, though, they never think to apply such knowledge. Most people fill out the table in a daze without ever using what they know. Their education and their position in society cause them not to think.

Such nonthinking occurs most commonly when society is the subject. “One of the major duties of an American citizen is to analyze issues and interpret events intelligently,” Discovering American History exhorts students. Our textbooks fail miserably at this task. The Vietnam exercise shows how bad the situation really is. Most college students, even high school students, would never put up with such obvious contradictions when thinking about, say, chemistry. When the subject is the social world, however, they are often guilty of nonsensical reasoning. Sociology professors are amazed and depressed at the level of thinking about society displayed each fall by the upper-middle-class students entering their first-year classes. These students cannot use the past to illuminate the present and have no inkling of causation in history, so they cannot think coherently about social life. Extending the terminology of Jules Henry, we might use “social stupidity” to describe the illogical intellectual process and conclusions that result.

Students who have taken more mathematics courses are more proficient at math than other students. The same is true in English, foreign language studies, and almost every other subject. Only in history is stupidity the result of more, not

less, schooling. Why do students buy into the mindless "analysis" they encounter in American history courses? For some students, it is in their ideological interest. Upper-middle-class students are comforted by a view of society that emphasizes schooling as the solution to intolerance, poverty, even perhaps war. Such a rosy view of education and its effects lets them avoid considering the need to make major changes in other institutions. To the degree that this view permeates our society, students automatically think well of education and expect the educated to have seen through the Vietnam War.

Moreover, thinking well of education reinforces the ideology we might call American individualism. It leaves intact the archetypal image of a society marked by or at least striving toward equality of opportunity. Yet precisely to the extent that students believe that equality of opportunity exists, they are encouraged to blame the uneducated for being poor, just as my audiences blame them for being hawks on the war in Vietnam. Americans who are not poor find American individualism a satisfying ideology, for it explains their success in life by laying it at their own doorstep. This enables them to feel proud of their success, even if it is modest, rather than somehow ashamed of it. Crediting success to their position in social structure threatens those good feelings. It is much more gratifying to believe that their educational attainments and occupational successes result from ambition and hard workthat their privilege has been earned. To a considerable degree, working-class and lower-class Americans also adopt this prevailing ethic about society and schooling. Often working-class adults in dead-end jobs blame themselves, focusing on their own earlier failure to excel in school, and feel they are inferior in some basic way Students also have short-term reasons for accepting what teachers and textbooks tell them about the social world in their history and social studies classes, of course.. They are going to be tested on it. It is in the students' interest just to learn the material. Arguing takes more energy, doesn't help one's grade, and even violates classroom norms. Moreover, there is a feeling of accomplishment derived from learning something, even something as useless and mindless as the answers to the identification questions that occupy the last two pages of each chapter in most history textbooks. Students can feel frustrated by the ambiguity of real history, the debates among historians, or the challenge of applying ideas

from the past to their own lives. They may resist changes in the curriculum, especially if these involve more work or work less clearly structured than simply “doing the terms.” After years of rote education, students become habituated to it and inexperienced and ineffectual at any other kind of learning.

In the long run, however, “learning” history this way is not really satisfying. History textbooks and most high school history teachers give students no reason to love or appreciate the subject. We must not ignore the abysmal ratings that history courses receive,24 and we cannot merely exhort students to like history more. But this does not mean the sorry state of learning in most history classrooms cannot be changed. Students will start learning history when they see the point of doing so, when it seems interesting and important to them, and when they believe history might relate to their lives and futures. Students will start rinding history interesting when their teachers and textbooks stop lying to them.

Once you have learned how to ask questionsrelevant and appropriate and substantial questionsyou have learned how to learn and no one can keep you from learning whatever you want or need to know.

Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner Do not try to satisfy your vanity by teaching a great many things. Awaken people's curiosity. It is enough to open minds; do not overload them.

Anatole France2 He is a lover of his country who rebukes and does not excuse its sins.

Frederick Douglass The future of mankind lies waiting for those who will come to understand their lives and take up their responsibilities to all living things.

VineDeloria, Jr.

Lies My Teacher Told Me

Afterword: The Future Lies Ahead and What to Do about Them

If the authors of American history textbooks took notice of the points made in the first ten chapters of this book, then textbooks would be far less likely to present, and teachers to teach, distorted and indefensibly incomplete accounts of our past. Lies My Teacher To/dMeis itself incomplete, however. It says little abour Hispanic history, for example, fet our textbooks are so Anglocentric that they might be considered Protestant history.5 What about women's history and the history of gender in America, two different but related topics? Lies mentions both subjects from time to time but makes no thorough critique of how textbooks present women's history and gender issues. And what about the next lie? The next historical marker, commemorative statue, museum exhibit, feature film set in the American past, television miniseries, or historical novel will probably pass on more misinformation. At the least, it will present its topic incompletely and partially. What is to be done about these future lies?

The answer is not to expand Lies My Tedcber Told Me to cover every distortion and error in history as traditionally taught, to say nothing of the future lies yet to be developed. That approach would make me the arbitrator-I who still unknowingly accept all manner of hoary legends as historical fact. Despite my sincere effort, this book undoubtedly contains important errors and should not simply be presumed true.7 Surely the answer is for all of us to become, in Postman and Weingartner's vulgar term, crap detectors3independent learners who can sift through arguments and evidence and make reasoned judgments. Then we will have learned how to learn, as Postman and Weingartner put it, and neither a one-sided textbook not a one-sided critique of textbooks will be able to confuse us.

To succeed, schools must help us learn how to ask questions about our society and its history and how to figure out answers for ourselves. At this crucial task most American history textbooks and courses fail miserably.

Part of the problem is with form. Because they try to cover so many things, textbooks, at least as currently incarnated, cannot effectively acquaint students with issues and controversies and thereby with historical argument, with its attendant skills of using logic and marshaling evidence to persuade. Mentioning is part of the problem. Even when textbooks discredit the myths that clog our historical arteries, students don't retain the tiny rebuttals in their history textbooks.9 They forget the untoward fact that contradicts the myth, for it doesn't fit with the powerful archetype. History textbooks and teachers must make special efforts and take enough time to teach effectively against these archetypes. Mircea Eliade has referred to “the inability of collective memory to retain historical events except insofar as it transforms them into archetypes.”10 Truth, to be retained, must be given the same mythic significance that we have given our lies,

Throughout the United States, roadside markers distort history. The former Confederate states are full of Civil War monuments and roadside markers, for example, that look back nostalgically at “the Lost Cause” and misrepresent Southerners as united in its defense. When Grant's gunboats moved up the Tennessee River into northeast Mississippi in February 1862, white residents of Tishomingo County lined the banks and cheered. In 1863 support from black residents in southwest Mississippi enabled Grant to abandon his supply lines and attack Vicksburg from the south and east. Despite this roadside marker's words, “the people” Grant's forces encountered were mostly African American who responded to “the blueclad invaders” by supplying them with food, showing them the best roads to Jackson, and telling them exactly where the Confederates were.

A marvelous teaching device would be for a class to examine roadside markers in their community, deciding which is least accurate. Then it could propose a corrective marker to stand next to the biased commemoration anO perhaps help raise money for its erection. In the process, students would learn much about the forces that push history, especially public history like markers and textbooks, to be inaccurate.

For this reason, I find myself tongue-tied when teachers ask what textbook I recommend. Perhaps no traditional textbook can be written that will empower rather than bore us with history.

What, then, is to be done?

The portrait of lying painted in the last two chapters as a vertically integrated industry, including textbook boards, publishers, authors, teachers, students, and the public, may appear bleak. It follows, however, that intervention can occur at any point in the cycle. The next few paragraphs are directed particularly toward teachers, who can intervene even in the absence of transformed textbooks. Those of us not in the classroom can play a role in changing how history is taught by supporting teachers who put innovative approaches into practice.

The first critical change must be in the form: we must introduce fewer topics and examine them more thoroughly. There is no way to get students to explore and bring primary and secondary sources to bear on the thousands of topics that now clutter history textbooks. Rather than having students memorize the names Amerigo Vespucci, Giovanni Verrazano, Ponce de Leon, Hernando De Soto, etc., and a phrase telling what each allegedly did, teachers can help students focus on the larger picturethe effects of Columbia's 1493 expe dition upon Haiti and Spain, and then on all the Americas, Europe, the Islamic world, and Africa. So many details connect with major issues such as this that I suspect students will come away remembering more particulars than if they had merely regurgitated factoids. Certainly students will recall the projects they worked on and the issues they worked through themselves. Many educators have already put into effect teaching methods that deviate from the deadening “learn the textbook” routine and provide models for other teachers.

Covering fewer topics will enable classes to delve into historical controversies. Doing so is an absolute requirement if students are to learn that history is not fust answers. The answers one gets depend partly upon the questions one asks, and the questions one asks depend partly upon one's purpose and one's place in social structure. Perhaps not everyone in the classroom will come to the same conclusion. Teachers need to put themselves in the position that for students to disagree with their interpretation is OK, so long as students back up their disagreement with serious historical work: argumentation based on evidence. Students who research both sides will discover which issues and questions facts will resolve, and which differences involve basic values and assumptions. The students' positions must then be respected. This does not imply that teachers should concede the floor or

accede to the now fashionable opinion that all points of view are equally appropriate and none is to be “privileged” with the label “true.”

Teachers do not have to know everything to facilitate independent student learning. They can act as informed reference librarians, directing children to books, maps, and people who can answer their questions about history. Resources already exist that can help teachers teach history creatively, using primacy materials.'

Perhaps the best resources are right at hand. Students can interview their own family members, diverse people in the community, leaders of local institutions, and older citizens. Some history classes have compiled oral histories of how the depression affected their town or how desegregation affected their school. Students in a Mississippi high school published a book, Minds Sixyed on Freedom, about the civil rights movement in their community.14 Students in a Massachusetts school “became” historical figures and published their work. For students to create knowledge is exciting and empowering, even ifthe product merely gets placed in the school library. Students might also suggest a new historical marker for their school or community. Often the most important events go unrecorded on the landscape, while markers commemorate the nineteenthcentury site of the First Presbyterian Church. What events at a high school were important enough to be noted on a marker? Which graduates “should” be commemorated? Which made history, and is a broader definition of “making history” needed? Do the names of local streets or buildings honor people whose acts we are now trying to rectify? Mississippi's Ross Barnett Reservoir, for example, pays tribute to the racist governor who tried to keep African Americans out of the University of Mississippi, while Medgar Evers, the state's heroic NAACP leader murdered because of his efforts on behalf of civil rights, goes remembered mainly by a college named for him in Brooklyn! Who should be honored? Why? How? Raising these questions leads students to important issues; if their answers are controversial, so much the better.

Teaching history backwards from the present also grips students' attention. The teacher presents current statistics on high school seniors' life chances, analyzed by race, sex, social class, and regiontheir prospects for various levels of educational achievement, divorce, incarceration, death by violence; their life expectancy, frequency of voting, etc. Then

students are challenged to discuss events and processes in the past that cause these differences.

Even if teachers do not challenge textbook doctrine, students and the rest of us are potential sources of change. If that statement seems idealistic, consider that African American students have actively pressured several urban school systerns for new curricula. White high school students throng to see revisionist movies about American history, whether by Kevin Costner (Dances with Wolves] or Spike Lee. Not history itself but traditional American history courses turn students off. Whether we read textbooks, see historical movies, or visit museum exhibits, we must learn how to deal with sources. This process entails putting five questions to each work.

First, why was it written (or painted, etc.)? Locate the audience in social structure. Consider what the speaker was trying to accomplish. This is part of what sociologists call the "sociology of knowledge" approach, English professors call it "contextualization" learning about the social context of the text.

A second question, also part of the sociology of knowledge approach, is to ask whose viewpoint is presented. Where is the speaker, writer, etc., located in social structure? What interests, material or ideological, does the statement serve? Whose viewpoints are omitted? Students might then attempt to rewrite the story from different viewpoints, thus learning that history is inevitably partial.

Third, is the account believable? Does each acting group behave reasonablyas we might, given the same situation and socialization? This approach also requires examining the work for internal contradictions. Does it cohere? Do some of its assertions contradict others? if textbooks emphasize the United States as a generally helpful presence in Latin America, for example, how do they explain anti-Yankee sentiment in the region?

Fourth, is the account backed up by other sources? Or do other authors contradict it? This question sends us to the secondary historical and social science literature. Even a cursory encounter with cross-cultural research on social class, for instance, is enough to refute the glowing textbook accounts of America as a land of unparalleled opportunity.

Finally, after reading the words or seeing the image, how is one supposed to feel about the America that has been presented? This analysis also includes examining the authors'

choice of words and images. “Most of the words we use in history and everyday speech are like mental depth charges,” James Axtell has written. “As they descend [through our consciousness] and detonate, their resonant power is unleashed, showering our understanding with fragments of accumulated meaning and association.”

Readers who keep these five questions in mind will have learned how to learn history.

Teachers and students are not the only fulcrtims for change. New factors make transformed textbooks possible. In California, Texas, and other states, rightwing conservatives still influence textbook adoptions, but so now do many others.

Beginning in 1985, for instance, Texas forced some publishers to treat evolution more honestly, avoid such stereotypical terms as go on the warpath, when referring to Native Americans, and add white before southerners where appropriate. The ensuing standoffs between black nationalists, feminists, right-wingers, First Amendment groups, etc., allow authors and publishers new room to maneuver.

Consumers of educationstudents, teachers, parents, and interested citizensare beginning to demand textbooks with real flavor, history that can even upset the stomach. According to Michael Wallace, Americans are ready for it. People generally “are angry at having been conned and are curious to know more,” he claims, “Witness the triumph of Roots in a culture once seemingly mired in the pieties of Gone with the Wind.”“ It is about time. For history is central to our ongoing understanding of ourselves and our society. We need to produce Americans of all social-class and racial backgrounds and of both genders who command the power of historythe ability to use one's understanding of the past to inspire and legitimize one's actions in the present. Then the past will seriously inform Americans as individuals and as a nation, instead of serving as a source of weary cliches. Products of successful American history courses know basic social facts about the United States and understand the historical processes that have shaped these facts. They can locate themselves in the social structure, and they know some of the societal and ideological forces that have influenced their lives. Such Americans ate ready to become citizens, because they understand how to effect change in our society. They know how to check out historical assertions and are

suspicious of archetypal ”truths." They can rebut the charge that history is irrelevant, because they realize ways that the past influences the present, including their own present.

Thomas Jefferson surely had it right when he urged the teaching of political history so that Americans might learn “how to judge for themselves what will secure or endanger their freedom.” Citizens who are their own historians, willing to identify lies and distortions and able to use sources to determine what really went on in the past, become a formidable force for democracy. Hugh Trevor-Roper, the dean of British historians, has written, “A nation that has lost sight of its history, or is discouraged from the study of it by the desiccating professionalism [or unprofessionalism!] ofits historians, is intellectually and perhaps politically amputated. But that history must be true history in the fullest sense.” After the eleven years of research and writing that went into this book,Ji my own quest to know what truly happened in our American past has only begun. After reading all this way, so has yours. Bon voyage to us both!